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UNWILLING PASSENGER

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PASSENGER

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BY

ARTHUR OSBURN

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' . . . he has spoken concerning the wisdom of the Gods . . . but I would speak of the courage of our Men-at-Arms and of the things they endure . . . not indeed because of the Gods but because of the pride and stupidity of our Senators . . . puffed up with ceremonies . . . the folly of our pro-consuls and the duplicity of governments and those who rule over us. . . . Hear me of your patience though I am but a simpleton , , , a Greek slave , , , '

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PART I

CHAPTER I

WAR AGAIN!

I have tried to set down here some recollections of the first 'Great War to end War', to describe the changes in feeling and outlook that took place in myself and, as far as I could judge, in varying degrees in those about me during those years of conflict and disillusion.

Written as this record has been, after the lapse of years, and under conditions which made it all but impossible to consult maps or books of reference, it has been a test of memory; for this reason and necessarily because the record is personal, it is not intended to pit its accuracy against the more complete and carefully documented diaries of those who wrote down their experiences at the time, and have since published them.

After this book was finished, I saw for the first time the first two volumes of the Official History of the War and found, as might have been expected, several discrepancies; but such as it is, this account must stand on its own merits. Amongst other differences the Official History of the War appears to make no mention of the abortive surrender of British troops at St. Quentin and the court-martial afterwards of the commanding officers concerned. Several other incidents are, if I may say so with all due respect, described in the Official History rather as the English would have had them happen than as they actually occurred.

The responsibility would have been less if I could have

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avoided mentioning any individual by name, but because certain units such as the Cavalry Regiment I served with were not as were Infantry formations expanded into numerous editions in the armies of volunteers and conscripts that came out later, any attempt to disguise the names of officers referred to in any regular Cavalry Regiment would have been futile. But the mention of any officer by name does not imply that agreement has been or could be reached as to what exactly happened in several of the situations described. Most incidents in war, especially in cavalry warfare, can be but flashlight impressions. An officer who served in the same regiment during the Retreat from Mons, the Battle of the Marne, and the first Battle of Ypres, has kindly helped to check the account here given. Any further corrections or confirmations would be welcomed.

Except for some of the officers and men in the Second Cavalry Brigade no one else is referred to in this book by name. I beg those whose names I have mentioned to pardon the liberty. There is not, I hope, much in this book that is likely to hurt the feelings of even the most sensitive of their friends or relations. Needless to say, any criticisms made or implied are made not against any individual as such—we were all only puppets, straws caught in a whirlwind, so largely the creatures of our environment, traditions, upbringing—but rather against the carefully cultivated idea that murder on a vast scale ceases to be murder but something rather admirable; that 'War is a glorious and heroic public exercise' and not the sordid scuffle which it must be. It is surely time that the schoolboyish and 'classical side' obsession that racial hatred is romantic, a Trojan Epic in which iniquity is confounded by a modern Thermopylae, a Marathon, or a Panipat; that it is but another *Anabasis*, or a kind of St. Michael and All Angels disembowelling

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Satan or St. George killing a Dragon—was outgrown.

Another apology is perhaps due. Though myself a stranger in the Brigade, I have referred to some of the officers by nicknames used only by their intimate friends and old comrades. Accustomed to hear them speak of one another thus, I soon learnt myself, in the scramble of those earlier weeks to do the same. Several were killed or missing before I learnt their full names. As no Monthly Army List was ever published for September, 1914, the names of those who joined us in August and September and were killed or had been transferred to other units before October cannot be verified.

Concerning the exploits of the officers and men of the units with which I was fortunate to serve—the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, the 9th Lancers, the Medical units I served with later, and the 20th Light Infantry Division—it would be hard to do justice; their names and deeds are written in the chronicles of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, recorded for all time on those long lines of tombstones grouped like attendant spirits in brigades and battalions about the battle memorials of France.

It happened that the 4th Dragoon Guards were actually the first of all the British Army to meet the enemy and to shake his confidence; the best introduction would be merely to enumerate their honours and their fate. It was certainly an exceptional Regiment. Seven or more of the surviving officers finished up as Generals, one as a Lieutenant-General. Carton de Wiart, ten times wounded, received the V.C. The number of Crosses of the Legion d'Honneur, D.S.O.'s, Military Crosses, Bars, Military Medals and other distinctions bestowed on the officers and men were too numerous to count. General Lord Allenby—not given to scatter praise—said it was

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one of his best regiments. Of those in the Regiment who escaped death or completely crippling wounds many, even some who had lost limbs early in the War, achieved distinction again in the Field, or immediately after the War. One became a Lieutenant-Governor in the Dominions, another Chief Whip of the Liberal Party, a third commanded the Ulster Constabulary. Others controlled the School for Machine-Gunners, led the Tank Corps, did Secret Service work, or blossomed out later as Doctors of Philosophy and Police Commissioners. I was little more than a spectator—a none too willing passenger on this strange adventure.

It is easy to praise one's brother officers; it is much harder justly to appreciate the merits of the rank and file; their sufferings and hardships, though inevitably greater, are much less seen and heard of. Especially because I once took part as a private soldier in a much less strenuous campaign, I feel how inadequate are words when one attempts to estimate the patience and valour, privation and suffering, the toil and the endurance of the rank and file in France and Flanders.

The private soldier, who may be just as sensitive and as well educated as those above him, must suffer and endure, often without knowing the object or the purpose of his exertions; that alone almost doubles the sense of uncertainty and the hardship of war. He must put up not only with the guile and fury of the enemy but with this constant uncertainty, and with the failures, blunders, impatience and often contradictory orders of his officers. Because it is mainly with the 'vile body' of the rank and file that Generals experiment, it is the rank and file that must always be the *first* to learn just how and why and to what extent each attack or manœuvre has been a failure, the *last* to learn the extent or significance of a success.

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Often knowing their efforts have failed and are merely bringing death or mutilation to themselves, they must yet continue an obviously futile attack until some officer—perhaps a boy only half their age—has convinced some other officer far from the fighting line that success is impossible.

The difference in our Army between the comforts and honours obtained and the hardships that have to be endured by the rank and file and the easier lot of their officers would be grotesque even if we were not all of the same race. The failures and follies of officers are often far more leniently punished than similar failings in the ranks, who not only have less comfort and food but have so much less to fight for. Whoever wins or loses the battle which he is ordered to fight, the economic surroundings of the average soldier at home are such that often he could scarcely be worse off than he is already even were his country defeated. Generally he will get less leave, always less honours and less pay than those above him. Therefore, in all justice, he must—and from all thinking men he should—receive a far greater admiration and respect than the officers and generals who have been 'set over him'.

Of the 9th Lancers, one may say their very name is famous. Lt.-Colonel David Campbell, V.C., their leader, now a Lieutenant-General, is Governor of Malta. Their record was as exceptional as that of the 4th Dragoon Guards. Being unfortunate enough twice to lose their own Medical Officer in the earlier months of the War, the first one within twenty-four hours of the onset, it fell to me from time to time to look after them also.

Of the officers and men of my own Corps with whom I afterwards served, I cannot speak too highly. They had

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to endure for years the hellish sights and surroundings of trench warfare, and carry out the arduous, exacting, multifarious and often conflicting duties thrust upon Field Ambulances and other mobile Medical Units by well-intentioned officials in high places—officials who little realized how much they asked, because they had never themselves served for a single day in such units or under such conditions. Many of the officers and men in these Medical Units were killed or wounded, many achieved distinction—all, with negligible exceptions, did almost impossible things with sangfroid, good humour and patient devotion. In a scene of another kind Milton has declared that to 'wait' is to 'serve'. Of all with medical knowledge, who worked without arms in their hands, this is surely true. They must wait for weeks and months, stand up to shell fire and machine-guns without any opportunity of replying or *any of that blissful ignorance that mothers courage*: only too much aware—however unimaginative they might be—of all the hideous possibilities and loathly complications of wounds not immediately fatal upon such foul battlegrounds. Of them one can only say that in the special torture, that inferno of anticipation that their training and knowledge invents for them, they indeed do mightily 'serve who only stand and wait'. No sailor in the conning towers at Jutland, no machine-gunner from Ypres or Verdun, no reckless airman, would deny that 'waiting' unarmed through long periods of incessant danger is the worst penalty to which an imaginative man—and who in these days, especially amongst doctors, is without imagination?—can be subjected.

Of the rank and file and officers of the 20th Division—whose names also, only too many, are written on the headstones in nearly all our great burial grounds in France—it would not only be superfluous but an im-

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pertinence even to attempt to assess what the thousands who passed through the ranks of that 'Light Division' merited and suffered. It was not for nothing that for years this Division fought shoulder to shoulder with the Guards Division, and that the Germans suspected a bitter attack threatened whenever it re-entered the line.

To write this book has been to remind myself that I have had my full share of failures and mistakes. Undoubtedly I also had luck—luck to get through practically unscathed; luck not to make worse mistakes than I did. Maeterlinck suggests that 'luck' is 'inherited merit'. If this is really so, then I have at least that much for which to thank my ancestors.

We all admit that we inherit from one or other of our ancestors our features, our tastes, and our aptitudes; but in the pride of our egoism, while we are forced by scientists to admit the inheritance of our bodies, we are still inclined to deny the *inheritance of the soul*. For my own part I feel that if somehow one contrived in the main to do one's duty, there was no personal merit in that; the inclinations and the aptitudes must have been born in one, as equally as any tendency to fail or to be timid, unreasonable, selfish, or forgetful. Some I have met in war and peace are untamable, born with a spirit that through fire and flood would storm the high battlements of heaven and laugh in hell. Others, congenitally timorous, will wilt and wither at the sarcasm of a chief, civil or military, at the thrusts of an overworked and hasty critic—the peevishness of a sub-editor hired to do his master's bidding. Such temperamental differences deserve neither praise nor blame; they are part of our soul's inheritance. Some—since Destiny plays her own special trick with each—are fated to have 'strong wills' and fiercely to deny that Fate, as such, can even exist, destined to rise early

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and work late, ever to strive and always to resist, doomed by the very eagerness of their fight against Destiny to accomplish the more completely their own destruction.

It was 11 p.m. on the 15th August, 1914. I sat rather disconsolately on the edge of a camp bed in a tent outside the Tidworth Mess of the 4th Royal Dragoon Guards, to whom I had been appointed as Medical Officer-in-Charge.

Though my 'secret' mobilization orders issued to me in 1911 ordered me to 'proceed to a Cavalry Regiment at Tidworth', I had no inkling which Regiment it was to be until August 6th, 1914, so it was that I had only known this Regiment a few days; but I already liked them all. They had certainly been extraordinarily kind and friendly from the very first.

But war *again!*

Memories of the South African War crowded back into my mind. The blazing heat by day, the bitter cold by night—without tents or blankets, ground-sheets or overcoats. The shortage of food, because our division, the 'Hungry Eighth', had lost nearly the whole of its transport from capture and cattle-sickness. Then there had been the constant dysentery that left us so weak we could hardly climb upon our horses. Who could forget the foul and stinking water, tasting of the carcasses of the trek-oxen that had died from cattle-sickness, 'stagged' in the broad quagmires that fringed the dwindling pools from which men and cattle had to drink! Would one ever forget the acrid stench of dead horses, dead mules, and dead men on that long march to Pretoria? The endless trekking, the maddening want of sleep, the appalling fatigue, the veldt-sores that covered our knees, our faces

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and our hands! The 'slow continued fever' (was it paratyphoid?) that puzzled the doctors, and the real typhoid that wiped out thousands! How much of all this would we have to endure again? And when it was all over, would *this* war be any more *use* than the Boer War, that had left such a legacy of bitter memories and anti-English intrigue in the huge territories of Southern Africa?

Well, the Germans would be tough customers. There would certainly be plenty of killing; and if it had taken our Empire two and a half years to smash fifty thousand Boers, then how long would it take us to defeat, even with the help of the French, seventy million Germans?

These throat-cutting expeditions—this killing business—surely it was too old, too easy, and too stale a jest.

I remembered how one blazing afternoon outside De Mets Dorp I had seen an odd-looking thing propped up against one of the great ant-hills on the sun-scorched plain beyond the town. Coming nearer, I saw it was human; but oddly enough, although the uniform on the clothed body evidently faced me, only the back of the head was visible! Had the head been twisted completely round in a death spasm of agony? A little nearer. . . . No! It was not the back of the head I peered at. Those maggot-filled holes, the clotted mass of beard and blood and hair that I had mistaken for the *back* of the man's head, was all that was left of his face. The poor thing wounded badly in the face—and face wounds bleed profusely and grow readily septic—had evidently been there for days. Half blind, it had perhaps just had strength enough to crawl to that ant-heap, and then die, alone, without even water; alone in the blistering heat and pitiless cold of those South African days and nights. The body was a seething mass of ants and flies.

And now—1914—there would certainly be more, much more, of this sort of thing.

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And then the filth of that South African Campaign! That great, dusty, fly-ridden camp at Bloemfontein that stank like a latrine, that was in fact little more than a huge latrine. The lice at Kroonstadt, every seam in our shirts a mass of grey eggs; the dysentery at Modder River, the ground round the hastily-dug latrines an ever broadening pool of blood and filth. The giant swarms of flies that collected at night in the tents to hang in the cold dawn in tight-packed bunches, like black stalactites, inside the peak of a tent. And in the day, these winged children of Baal Zebub, the God of Flies, had to be blown or brushed from one's food between every bite.

And now this War! Would we take the few overseas possessions of the German when we already had so many huge Colonies of our own? Was it Naboth's Vineyard, or were we just jealous of German industry and success? One really hated and feared rivals more for their virtues that made them dangerous, than for their vices which only put them more or less at your mercy.

The smeach of the dying candle roused me. It was too late to worry out now just how War had come. I remembered reveillé was to be within a few hours. Taking off spurs and belt I loosed my field-boots and lay down between the blankets, wondering again, as how many thousands of Englishmen must have wondered since, if I should come back to England or fall into a perpetual sleep in France. And then, alas! I was a doctor. I began to wonder whether other and worse things than death might not befall me. No picnic this; the test would be severe. Would I lose my nerve and be shot for cowardice? Would a fragment of shell or bullet ricocheting from the ground and lodging in my spine paralyse my legs, my bladder and my bowels, leaving me foul, incontinent and helpless, an offence to myself and others—to

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die from bedsores and gangrene after twelve years of wasting agony in Netley Hospital? After all, I had seen many others have to endure this, after the Boer War. Month after month I had dressed their foul wounds at Netley. For them it had been living death. Why should I expect to escape a similar fate?

What a futile muddle everything was! Yet as a regular soldier there was no option. It was war again; and I must go cheerfully and perform my duty faithfully and, if Fate should ordain, die (and clearly in the circumstances that was likely, more than likely) as courageously as I could, well aware in my own mind that I was not brave, in fact about as nervous as the proverbial mouse.

I suppose I slept.

Then clear and harsh—strident, insistent, defiant in the darkness—our Cavalry trumpets rang out their terrible imperative—*reveillé!* It was 2.30 a.m. and War,

War Again!

CHAPTER II

MONS—THE OVERTURE

Sunday, the twenty-third of August, 1914. We had arrived at Thulin on the bank of the canal that stretches from Mons to Condé. We had had no sleep worth talking about for some days and had been already, the first unit in the British Army, in contact with the enemy. On the Saturday, Hornby with a half squadron had got as far as Soignies where, from the church tower, the field of Waterloo was just visible. They had pursued and charged some German cavalry: Bavarian ploughboys in German uniforms—that was all they really were. These boys carried long metal lances, like lengths of gas piping, they could not manage. Some of these lads had been killed and three or four wounded and captured. Fair, resolute, genial and a keen soldier, Hornby with his troop, magnificently mounted—as indeed we all were—yelling at full charge, their long straight swords a glittering row of steely points, would have put fear into far more hardened soldiers. I was not surprised, when I saw them, that several of these young Bavarians had turned tail. I could speak a few words of German and as I dressed their wounds I asked them what they thought of the War. They said they did not know what to make of it, nor what it was all about. They had, they said, been called up for military training only a few weeks before the War broke out. Both our men and our horses were heavier than theirs, and, lunging well for-

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ward with his sword, a Dragoon could 'reach' nearly as far as their lances. Apparently they had nearly all shown very little fight; some of our men pursuing them had refrained at first from running two of them through—because their 'backs were turned'! This chivalry and gallantry was not to last very long. Hornby's sword had been already blooded. He showed it to me—about four inches of the blade near the tip was smeared with blood. I asked one of the prisoners for a button, which he cut off—my first souvenir! Rather tearfully he insisted that his brother had been shot at Munich for refusing to join up, and that he himself was very pleased he had been taken prisoner and would not have to take any further part in the War.

After forty-eight hours of almost continuous movement we had finished up with a long night ride through the wretched slums of Frameries, Wasmes and Paturages. That ride had been a nightmare; a thin drizzle had turned the coaldust that lay everywhere into a greasy slime; our horses, half asleep like ourselves, had staggered on, stumbling over the uneven cobbles and cinder heaps, slipping and falling on the endless network of tram and trolley lines. So on that Sunday we were all drowsy and slack; yet the tension in the air was unmistakable. Early in the afternoon there had fallen an ominous silence. Everyone and everything, even the great line of elm trees opposite our billet, seemed to be attentive, as if waiting for something to happen. A sense of impending disaster pervaded the silent village. We knew that the Germans were not far away. I wrote a postcard to my mother and dropped it into the village postbox—then, remembering that we had been forbidden to do this, I wrote another and dropped it into the Brigade postbag. Twenty minutes afterwards we were engaged in the Battle of Mons; five hours later we had begun the

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long Retreat; yet *both* cards reached my mother.

I shall not easily forget the overture of that extraordinary battle. At three-thirty on that sultry Sunday afternoon there arose, apparently about eight hundred yards in front of us, a crackling sound exactly like the noise of an October bonfire into which a cartload of dry holly boughs has been suddenly thrown. A fierce, steady crackle that grew ominously louder and angrier and nearer, moment by moment. I had heard nothing like *that* in the Boer War!

My heart sank. There surged over me the first and worst moments of dismay—of fear—in the War. Afterwards I was often partly indifferent to danger from sheer exhaustion, nerve strain and fatigue, yet not seldom—like, I think, most others—I walked with Fear, or at least apprehension, a tall grey figure stalking by my side, or never very far away. . . . The deep thunder of our own or enemy artillery fire could be stimulating, but the angry crackle of massed rifles I shall always loathe.

The Regiment mounted, and we moved off a few hundred yards to the left and dismounted again. A German and an English plane, firing viciously at one another, circled overhead. Robert Hutchison, one of our Majors—now no longer a soldier but a prominent politician—who was standing beside me remarked that it was 'the first real drama of the air' that the world had seen.

The Infantry in the line ahead of us were evidently in for a hot time. We, as Cavalry, were merely standing-to for eventualities. Presently, wounded from the Infantry regiments just in front of us began to limp and stagger down the road on our right. I left the Regiment and walked over to some cart-sheds just across this road, which I had already marked down as my prospective 'dressing station'. My groom and servant, and my corporal, led our horses over, and I knelt down in the shed to

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dress the first of the British troops who had been wounded. As I did so the first bursts of German shrapnel were coming over with a venomous buzz like swarms of angry hornets. Soon I was up to my eyes in work, the knees of my riding-breeches soaked with the blood that was running all over the place from those who were badly wounded.

More and more, in twos and threes, sixes and sevens, then in streams, the wounded poured in, some walking, some carried pick-a-back or in hand-seats and a few on stretchers. Manchesters and D.C.L.I.'s, K.O.S.B.'s, and several other regiments. But where were their doctors? There seemed to be not a sign of one! I did not realize then the almost hopeless task that the Infantry doctors were engaged in. My orderly and myself made desperate attempts to cope with the streams of wounded men. The whole of the cart-sheds were now full of wounded that lay or sat about in the mud and sodden straw. Every post was being clung to by those able to stand; some slipped down and fainted. There were now streams of men, presumably wounded, passing right and left across the fields—I knew not to where. It never occurred to me that anyone was retreating. More shrapnel was coming over and our own Horse Artillery was replying. We must have been there for hours, but it seemed only a few minutes before we were lighting candles and lanterns to see what we were doing. So numerous now were the wounded that I could only find time to look at the worst and then do little more than tighten an amateur tourniquet, or plug a gaping wound in the chest wall with gauze, and give morphia in heroic doses to those who appeared to be in the most pain. I had read several books on military surgery but could not remember having come across any remark concerning the relative frequency of right-sided and left-sided

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wounds; and I remember being struck on that first day by the numbers wounded in the left arm and especially in the left lung; yet considering the position of an infantryman in the firing line this was what I ought to have expected.

Presently I heard my corporal, who had been outside, speaking to some men who were evidently not wounded. He came back looking disturbed.

‘There are a lot of men crowded down in the ditches outside who are not wounded, sir.’

I got up and went out. A blaze of burning hayricks and a bright glow from a hundred thousand rifles in rapid fire lit up the darkening northern sky just beyond some trees. Down the centre of the road on the other side of which I had left my Regiment were coming streams of wounded: hopping, crawling, walking or being carried, but the dry ditches on either side of the road just outside my ‘dressing station’ were full of whispering shadows.

‘What’s the matter with you all there?’ I demanded.

There was no reply from the huddled forms in the darkness of the ditch. I was really too weary to be indignant, but I pretended to be.

‘If you don’t immediately rejoin your Regiments in the firing line I’ll take every man’s name and Regiment and send him to his Adjutant. You know what that means—court-martial for desertion in the face of the enemy!’

There was a silence and then a few, only a few, of the huddled forms sullenly emerged with their rifles and walked with slow, depressed steps back towards that pink glow and that ‘holly-bush’ crackling beyond the trees.

I stood for a moment in the middle of the road and watched them. Shrapnel was coming over the road a little further up and over the fields on my left and right

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with a continuous angry buzz; some of the other shadows were flitting from the ditches, but not towards the firing line.

How easy it is to order others into greater danger than one is in oneself! Not once, but many times, it was my duty in the War to do this; I never did it without secretly loathing it. I knew that I had, compared with an Infantry private anyway, a comparatively safe and easy job.

Back to the wounded. There was not standing room in the yard now, and there were ominous whispers beginning—words like a ‘mucking retreat’ or a ‘mucking defeat’, but I did not take them seriously. The firing in front appeared to be dying down; the crowds of men upon the road were increasing, and now certainly not all wounded. I ordered some of the men who were slightly wounded to put the horses in a neighbouring stable into the carts, load the carts up with wounded, and take them back along the road away from the firing. Then I began to be assailed with doubts about my *own* position. I was threatening deserters with court-martial and death, but what was I doing myself? Where was my Regiment? It was no longer in the field opposite. The cart-sheds in which I was working were safe enough, only a few spent bullets were falling in the field on my right. But my Regiment! What were they doing? Perhaps engaged in some desperate charge while I was here safe and sound attending only to Infantry for whom I had no official responsibility whatever! What would they say to me for having left them in this way—with a plausible, easy excuse about the Infantry wounded and no doctors—when my services were perhaps at that very moment being as urgently required by them? I had certainly said to an officer of the Regiment standing near me that I was going over to look after any wounded unattended; and the Regiment no doubt must have seen my small caval-

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cade of horses and orderlies moving off to the sheds; but they had sent me no word of warning about leaving, although they were dismounted only two or three hundred yards away. Still it was more my business to keep in touch with them than theirs with me. They had other things to think of.

Getting suddenly alarmed at all the possibilities, I hurriedly collected my gear and we mounted, leaving, alas! many wounded, some partly and others quite unattended. I left them in charge of a senior non-commissioned officer of Infantry who was only slightly wounded. I reminded him of the most simple forms of tourniquets and, giving him an armful of dressings, advised him when the carts came back to remove all the rest of the wounded to Thulin, the village about half a mile back on the road behind us. This I think he did, for carts with wounded began arriving while I was attending to those already in the Town Hall there. This was not the only time in which it was impossible to fulfil my duty to my unit and the wounded of other units.

We entered the little town of Thulin in darkness and silence; indeed, I was rather surprised how silent everything had suddenly become. There was but one building that had any light in it. As we passed it I was besieged by a party of Belgian priests and nuns.

'M'sieur is a doctor? Please come in at once—in here! There are many English wounded! There are no doctors! We do not know what to do!'

I dismounted and entered what was evidently the *Mairie* or Town Hall. The steps were thronged with a jostling crowd of wounded. Many excited Belgian peasants and Sisters of Mercy were carrying in mattresses, straw, jugs of water and old sheets for bandages.

The scene inside was one with which I was soon to be only too familiar. It was packed with wounded, lying

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down, crouching or standing; the stairs were blocked with sitting cases, the passages with loaded stretchers. There were several whose hastily applied tourniquets had evidently slipped, lying in a dead faint from loss of blood. Everywhere lights and confusion and a babel of tongues—Cockney 'French', Flemish and broken English. I spoke only a little French, and getting hold of the most responsible looking of the priests and the older of the Catholic Sisters, I urged them to keep the badly wounded cases on the ground floor, and send all the slightly wounded cases up to the rooms on the upper floors of the building; they had started doing the very reverse!

'But why, m'sieur?'

'Because in case of fire, you will never get the stretcher cases down again in time, if you carry them up those narrow stairs.'

'Fire! But why should there be a fire? The bad cases will be more comfortable upstairs. Besides there are far too many slight cases to put up in the small rooms above. And some of the upper rooms are locked—half full of the town Records.'

'Never mind,' I said. 'Burst the doors open. Let all the wounded who can walk go up and leave the stairs and passages free. They can sit down on the floor in the upstairs rooms.'

We began gradually to get the place in some sort of order. The palliasses and mattresses which were being brought in we arranged in rows. Straw had been put down where there were no mattresses; much too much straw—the harvest was just beginning.

The Sisters were giving the men cigarettes. I tried to dissuade them. 'Don't encourage them to smoke here, or you will soon have all this straw on fire.'

'Soldiers! Poor English soldiers! Not smoke! After such a brave battle!' They gazed at me, astonished.

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might as well have ordered them to stop the men breathing.

Soon I was terribly busy with the worst cases. Only two can I remember in all that confusion. One badly wounded in the head, yet conscious enough to point to the man lying next to him.

'Sir, that man alongside blew off his own right hand recharging a fuse to blow up a bridge across that canal which the Germans had captured. He went back alone of his own accord to do it himself—the first charge wouldn't go off. If he hadn't stopped the Germans, they would have enfiladed our whole line.'

The men were I think both Royal Engineers. I dressed the stump of the hero of the bridge and hastily scribbled his name and number in my notebook.

'You won't be forgotten,' I said; 'you deserve a V.C. I'll see that the General hears about it.'

I was in the midst of giving instructions as to each wounded man not injured in the stomach having at least a litre of milk a day when an excited Sister seized me by the arm.

'M'sieur! Go at once! The Germans are here!'

'Here!'

'Yes, m'sieur, in the street outside! No! Not that way! By the side door—to the right! Quick! Quick!'

I dashed to the side door to find my groom and orderly looking pale and excited. They too had just seen the Germans, indeed had actually rubbed shoulders with them in the darkness outside. We all three flung ourselves on our horses and dashed away from the *Mairie* not knowing in the least which direction to take.

A light rain had begun to fall and the cobblestones were greasy. Shots behind added wings to our speed. Galloping madly in the darkness, slithering and skidding through those silent streets, we were nearly down half a dozen times.

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Where was everybody? What had become of the British Army? Why had nobody told me? Where were we galloping to?

'Ou sont les Chasseurs Anglais? Ou sont les Dragons de la Garde?' I shouted through the echoing streets, the excitement playing havoc with my scanty French. There was no answer to my ill-judged questions, only shots and the echoes of our clattering hoofs.

Suddenly we were fired at point blank from in front; the flash showed a group of dismounted Cavalry on the left of the road.

Someone shouted in French: *'Qui va la?'*

The voice had an unmistakable English accent.

'Who's that?' I shouted. 'I'm 4th Dragoon Guards.'

'9th Lancers,' answered the voice. 'Where the hell have you come from?'

We had bumped into the rear troop of the rearguard of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. Geoffrey A'Court, I think it was, and his men were guarding the railway crossing. There was a hurried explanation, and the sliding metal gates rolled back for us to cross the lines.

I found my Regiment half a mile back in a soaking cornfield, whose every sheaf drenched one as one touched it. No lights were to be shown, and it was almost out of the question to lie down, for the ground was sodden. We had had only a very few light casualties in the Regiment; Pat Fitzgerald, our machine-gun commander, had his cheek slit open with a bullet. I sewed up the wound, several inches long, by the screened light of a candle as he and I crouched behind a sheaf. The road past the field was crowded with Belgian peasants and their children hurrying away in the dark, wet through, panic-stricken, and loaded with household impedimenta.

For a moment or two I watched the refugees, trying to think what on earth could be happening. It was un-

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believable that any part of the British Army should have begun to retire in the first few hours of armageddon. Would not some of us be court-martialled? The Army and Navy had for years been looking forward in confidence to a sharp decisive scrap with Germany. In the naval wardrooms I had visited and the military messes I had lived in, conversation constantly returned to that subject. We had all been cheerfully assured of victory; prepared to the last range-finder, ready to the last gaiter-button—and now!

Presently a bright light flared up on the sky behind us; some of the refugees turned, their white faces lit by the glare.

‘What’s that?’ I asked.

‘It must be the Town Hall, m’sieur. It is the only building of that size in Thulin!’

So the expected had happened! I have always had a horror of fire, especially in hospitals; I thought of that crowded building with so many nearly helpless men and confused and frightened priests and Sisters—of the suffocating blaze and smoke from damp straw, khaki clothing and mattresses. How ghastly! But with all that straw and all those men smoking it needed no prophet to foresee what was almost a certainty.

And my V.C. hero—too weak from loss of blood from that jagged stump to walk! Poor devil! He had looked as white as a sheet—was he at that moment being burnt alive?

I fumbled for my notebook. At least this gallant soldier should have posthumous honour—his mother and his relations, his corps and his country should know of his self-sacrifice. My notebook was gone! I had had it in my hand when the Sister warned me. That panic-stricken dash from the Town Hall, the mad ride over those greasy cobblestones, accounted only too easily for

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the loss. Should any Royal Engineer who fought near Thulin that night read these lines, possibly even now the man's name might be discovered. Perhaps he has already been posthumously honoured, or best of all possibly he escaped from that blazing hospital and was cared for by the enemy. As I learnt afterwards, the Germans—all things considered—devoted great care and skill, sometimes were even very kind, to our wounded.

CHAPTER III

SHRAPNEL MONDAY

Shrapnel Monday! Chill dawn and rifle shots roused Sus, wet and weary, in that soaked cornfield. All at once it seemed the battle had begun again. Already there were wounded men of other units strewn about on the edges of our field and in some rough ground nearby. I began to dress some of them and did not notice that my own Regiment had moved off—retiring towards Marlière and beyond to a network of embankments and railway lines that marked the outskirts of the mining village of Elouges. Some of our infantry, and dismounted men of the 9th Lancers and 18th Hussars, crouched behind hedges and inequalities in the ground, were replying to the German fire. German Taubes came humming overhead, sending out smoke signals as to our position; within thirty seconds their gunners were sending shrapnel over us in bursts.

My small group with its three horses, looking for wounded and stopping to dress them, began to attract unpleasant attention. Fighting men are taught and bound to take cover except when actually charging; a regimental doctor often cannot do his work properly in the field without presenting a target likely to draw fire. His movements conveniently indicating to the enemy the approximate position of his own fighting troops, he can easily be a real and most irritating embarrassment to his own side.

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Gradually we confined our search to the less exposed positions. Would it have been more soldierly to risk the lives of three men on the off-chance of discovering on exposed stretches of ground and within rifle shot of the enemy stray cases badly needing attention? I can only say what we did.

On this day the 18th Hussars had become the rearguard of the Brigade, which was itself the rearguard of that part of the British Army. Gradually our men were being pressed back towards the outskirts of Elouges. The firing seemed to be slackening—nearly everyone seemed to be retiring, including the 9th Lancers. I had rather the feeling of being left behind, and decided to give up looking for wounded and try to rejoin my Regiment. On my way, near Marlière, I passed Middleton, the Medical Officer-in-Charge of the 9th Lancers. Dismounted, he was standing behind a wall that enclosed the garden of a small château. Six or seven severely wounded men whom he had dressed were ranged on stretchers in a line behind the wall, protected more or less from bullets that were hopping about in all directions. I stopped to speak to him. As I did so, bullets glancing from the side of the brick wall were ricochetting on the road within a few yards of us.

‘What are you going to do, Middleton?’

‘I don’t know. There are only three small horse ambulance wagons, and they are already full! I can’t very well leave these poor devils without anyone with them.’

‘But won’t you get captured if you stay?’

His quiet resolution to remain impressed me. The impression cooled on the reflection that if he got captured I should have an additional regiment to look after—and it was none too easy to keep in touch with my own.

I overtook the three Horse Ambulance wagons of wounded, and as there was still a little room for sitting

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cases in them I ordered them to halt at 'Kilometre 4', a point just beyond and west of Elouges. A few hundred yards further on I overtook the rear squadron of my Regiment. As I joined them they broke into a sharp trot; we rode under a railway bridge and swung sharply to the right. Leaving our horses near some trees we lined up on the railway embankment, lying flat in the grass, our heads just level with the metals. In a moment word was passed along that the Germans were advancing—and then a warning that we were not to fire as a squadron of the 18th Hussars were crossing from left to right. Our position was promptly marked by the German planes, and we were plastered with shrapnel—prompt and accurate enough, but bursting much too high; the bullets rattling off our boots harmlessly. As we lay there in the grass, looking northwards over the low ground we had retired from, I could see the German Infantry already in our cornfield. I wondered what had happened to Middleton.

My responsibilities rather weighed on me. Suppose he *was* captured!—and then there was the Battery of Horse Artillery attached to our Brigade, they also had no doctor, and the Signallers and Brigade staff . . . I devoutly hoped the war would be soon over. Middleton's Regiment, the 9th Lancers, were retiring south and east of us, galloping under some bridges on our right up the slope and then along the top of another railway embankment south of the one we were on. I recognized Porter of the 9th Lancers by his horse, and actually saw him fall on the railway track just as a burst of shrapnel came over. He was hit in the arm and leg, but not badly. Suddenly we got an order to mount again. Galloping down to the road on which we had just been, we swung to the right, passed under another railway bridge, up a steep little hill, and halted in a narrow lane behind the wall of a

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small cemetery, with a diminutive field of Indian corn on the opposite side.

We were now halfway up a long gentle slope which faced the German position. Some of our field and horse batteries were getting into position still higher up. Very faintly like a grey-green mist the Germans could be seen advancing, their movements rather obscured by several gigantic conical heaps of slag and cinders. Standing out amidst the waste of railway lines and cinder heaps that intervened between us and the Germans and far away to the left was a tall narrow building, an isolated factory. I located our exact map-position on the official map as being at the letter 'h' in the name of a hamlet called *Wiheries*. It was then about 10 a.m., perhaps earlier. While there I dressed some slightly wounded men—gunners—who had been hit that morning. Presently we moved on westwards, descending twice into green valleys, through two small villages, one with a convent flying the Geneva Red Cross flag lying below us on the left. I remember noticing how beautifully the lime trees in the village street had been clipped fanwise or shaped into arches. On the further side of one of these valleys at the top of the incline the road forked, with a miniature chapel or shrine in the angle. Here we found the rest of the Brigade—it was the last time we were to see many of them.

During the halt there I directed the three Cavalry Field Ambulance wagons now overloaded with wounded (Porter and others had squeezed into one of them) to push on without stopping, keeping southward and a little westward until they got to Sebourg and Jenlain unless they got other instructions. We had overtaken these ambulances in one of the villages, we had just come through, our General cursing me heavily for permitting one of them to halt for a moment to get some milk for the

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wounded. Judging from one of his expressions and his extreme irritation, we were in a dangerous position. Anyway, the three Ambulance wagons eventually escaped capture.

It is hard to describe clearly what happened during the next two hours, or just when and where the trouble began; but as it concerns one of the most famous incidents of the Retreat from Mons, it may be worth while to make some attempt, though I was but a puzzled spectator and not an actor. The difficulty in giving a clear account was increased by the confusing nature of the country. Within a radius of about three thousand yards of Elouges and of one another lay at least six little villages: Angre, Angreau, Audregnies, Montignies, Onezies and Wiheries—similar in size, each situated in a little valley their names having to English ears a similar sound. Outside each village and as alike as two peas were one or more little cemeteries surrounded with brick walls. In or near this area, strange to us on that eventful morning, dotted as it was with conical slag-heaps about sixty feet high, and intersected with many sunken roads, railways and trolley lines, no less than three brigades or twenty-seven squadrons of our cavalry were active between 8 a.m. and noon, in addition to several battalions of infantry and many artillery units. If my account of what I saw appears confused this must be my only excuse.

It must have been about 11 a.m. when the Brigade turned about at the shrine and rode back through the two villages towards the small cemetery at Wiheries. The Brigade halted twice. Artillery fire had begun on our right: this I supposed to be our guns on the hillside to the south and east of us. Then heavy firing began from the whole German line, that is, to the north and

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east and also on our left; some—not very much—shrapnel was coming over. I had the impression that an important move was about to take place, and as my position in an action should be alongside my own Colonel, who was on ahead, I decided to overtake him. I saw him and a few of his Staff turn up to the right and then halt. The remainder of the Regiment—all three squadrons as I thought—turned to the left, towards the Germans. I missed my groom and stopped for a moment to look for him; then a squadron of the 9th who had got just in front of me turned about, and I had perforce—because of the narrowness of the lane—to turn about with them. They turned down to their right between two walls, and there they halted, facing the Germans. I turned about again intending to rejoin the headquarters of my own Regiment. Instead of overtaking them I found myself with some of the 18th Hussars riding up a slope above some railway lines towards where our Field and Horse Batteries were halted. The firing had become much heavier. Some of our Cavalry were riding towards the railway lines between us and the Germans, making apparently for the tall brick building—a sugar factory.

A perfect hurricane of shelling began. Then the whole scene was blotted out in smoke and dust. Like most of the others, I had heard no orders, did not know a charge was taking place; I don't think anyone except those taking part in it did, and many of them told me afterwards they thought it was only a reconnaissance. The noise was now terrific. Shells were bursting higher up the hill; some seemed to be skimming just overhead. With two mounted signallers and a man of the 18th Hussars I rode in between two walls close to a cemetery, where we sheltered. The broad slope of the hill above and behind—to the south of us—was now one white cloud of bursting shell. Then some of the 9th and 18th

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came galloping past us excitedly. Everybody seemed to be shouting, though the din was so deafening we could not hear what they said; but with the signallers I followed some of them, only to find myself again in one of the villages we had passed through nearly an hour before.

It must then have been about 11.30 a.m. The hussar—an officer's servant—had followed after us. He and I rode up to the hilltop crowned by the little shrine at the fork roads. The artillery fire all round was very heavy. I could see troops moving down below me—*across* our front—but whether English or German I could not be certain.¹ Unaware that my Regiment—and indeed the whole Brigade—were dispersed and disorganized, temporarily non-existent, I started off again to find them.

Only by piecing together the conflicting accounts and experiences of survivors did I manage during the next week to get a hazy idea of the day's events. At 10 a.m. the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, sixteen or seventeen hundred officers and men, Dragoons, Lancers and Hussars, had been practically intact; yet before noon it was so broken and scattered as to be for the time being non-existent. By 7 p.m., that evening about two hundred men and a few officers had arrived in Wagnies-le-Petit believing themselves to be the only survivors. Whole batteries of Horse and Field artillery had apparently been exterminated.

One account was that General De Lisle, hearing that the Fifth infantry division on our right was in difficulties, and trying to extricate itself from the German attack, had placed his Brigade at the disposal of the G.O.C. To delay the advance of the Germans on our retreating infantry and prevent the capture of our Field Batteries, our Brigade was to make some sort of demonstration in force.

¹ Probably the Cheshires or part of our XIXth Brigade.

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This was to be preceded by a reconnaissance of the ground by two troops of the 18th Hussars or the 9th Lancers.

Either the orders were confused or confusing—or the General's commands were given direct to the troops and squadrons concerned, always a fatal mistake, instead of being passed as they should have been through the Regimental Commanders.

At all events the two troops¹ sent out to reconnoitre had been followed by practically the whole Brigade. The Germans, seeing a comparatively large mass of cavalry suddenly let loose and galloping towards them, got a bad attack of nerves—why, it is hard to understand, for the network of hedges, wire fences, allotments, trolley lines and other obstructions made it unlikely that our cavalry would ever reach either their infantry or guns. But nearly every German gun within range had at once been put on to the small area on which our cavalry were moving. Presumably to counter this our Field and Horse Artillery had also been compelled to open fire, thus disclosing prematurely and fatally their own position. They in turn had been hopelessly hammered by the German massed artillery. A first-class 'battle' had in fact developed with the rapidity of a whirlwind from this muddled order. For the German infantry imagining themselves to be really threatened also by this charge of British cavalry, had taken it seriously and checked their advance. Every rifle and machine-gun on their side was now also blazing away at our desperate and rather objectless cavalymen.

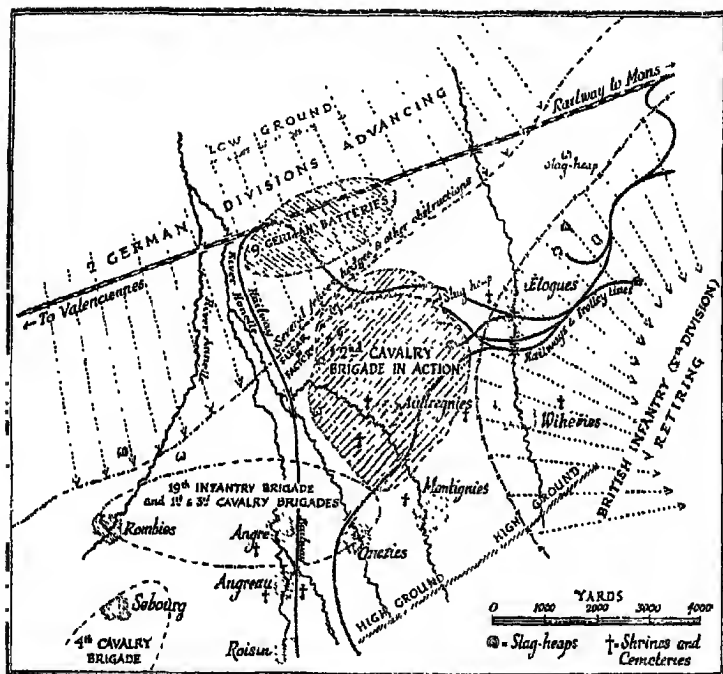
¹ A cavalry 'troop' consisted of one officer and about thirty-five men. Four of these troops form a squadron, three squadrons with a headquarters and machine-gun section formed a cavalry regiment, and three regiments a brigade to which a battery of horse artillery was usually attached. In all about two thousand officers and men.

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What all our men exactly did—indeed, what any of them did—when they debouched from behind those walls into a perfect hurricane of shell and machine-gun fire, and the clouds of dust and ashes disturbed from the slag-heaps no one seemed quite to know. Some eventually got over to the sugar factory, from which they were soon driven out again by furious machine-gun fire; hundreds crashed amongst the railway lines, horses tripped on the low signal-wires or pitched headlong—breaking their riders' necks—into ballast pits near the railway; some even reached the hedge and wooden palings bounding the allotments on the far side of the railway, fairly terrifying the Germans—as a German told me afterwards in Cologne—by their reckless and meaningless onrush, some few actually galloped under this terrific fire through a half-circle of two miles and survived. The Vicomte de Vauvineur, our principal liaison officer, was blown to pieces with many of the 4th Dragoon Guards around him. Most of the other French officers attached to us were either killed or wounded. Major Tom Bridges's horse was shot under him and the bones of his face badly damaged as he crashed on the railway lines. Climbing into the sugar factory at which half a dozen German machine-guns were firing, he got out of a window and, dropping on to the back of a riderless horse, somehow got away. Although the casualties eventually turned out to be much less heavy than at first supposed, about three hundred of our magnificent horses—many of them had come, I heard, from Rothschild's stables when the War broke out—had been killed. Many more exact, lucid and authentic accounts of this exploit must have been written, but that was all I ever heard.

The London papers, hard up for any cheering news, transmuted this unfortunate affair into 'a magnificent

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11 a.m. August 24th, 1914.

Sketch map of the ground over which the 'charge' of the 4th Dragoon Guards, 9th Lancers and the 18th Hussars took place.

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charge of the 9th Lancers—German gunners sabred!’

Colonel David Campbell, commanding the 9th Lancers, was, so we were told, offered a V.C. on the strength of it all, an honour he was said to have indignantly refused. ‘I want my squadrons back again, not V.C.’s or medals!’ He was afterwards awarded the V.C. for great personal bravery.

Alone at the shrine except for the man of the 18th Hussars, there was nothing to do but ride back again to where I had last seen my O.C. and his Staff. It was obviously one’s duty, yet it certainly did not look very inviting back there. The hussar was vague but thought there had been a charge; he followed me back, neither of us very enthusiastic. The first village was now entirely deserted, no British to be seen anywhere. On the cross-road near Wiheries we met some men of the 18th Hussars without an officer, galloping out of the village, and they in answer to our shouted question as to where the Brigade was pointed vaguely southward. I felt convinced they didn’t know; but, seeing some of his own unit, my companion had turned about and followed them.

I was now quite alone, and my resolution began to fail. Except for two wounded gunners, one with only his finger damaged, leading an officer’s horse that was also wounded, and another wounded in the shoulder whom I dressed, I saw no one. The two gunners told me we were ‘retiring’. I pointed to the hillside above where our Batteries¹ perhaps two thousand yards away were still firing and being shelled.

‘But who are retiring? Those must be our guns up there still. Are they Field or Horse batteries?’

‘Don’t know, sir! Not our lot, anyway. We are looking for ours.’

¹ ? ‘L’ Battery R.H.A. and 119th R.F.A.

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They had seen no cavalry, that was all I could get out of them. After that I didn't meet a soul. I began to hesitate, I was nearly halfway back towards Elouges now. It was unpleasant being so alone and so ignorant. Where *was* the Regiment? I stopped. Should I ride up to the batteries and ask if they knew? I turned about; it seemed hopeless.

It is hard now, looking back upon it all, to realize the extent of my ignorance. I had, of course, not the slightest inkling that there was any deliberate intention on the part of the British Army to keep on retiring. So far from that, I interpreted the dash forward of some of our cavalry that morning as an attempt to recover the ground we had lost since the previous afternoon. As I had seen no one return I was inclined to suppose we *had* recovered some of the ground, and that I should find my Regiment perhaps back somewhere near the cornfield we had spent the night in. I had dropped my cigarette case there, and it would be a bit of luck to get back to have another look for it. If anyone had told me that my regiment and in fact the whole Brigade had been badly cut up and were dispersed and scattered in several directions I should only have thought they were mad. Yet it was hard to reconcile our having captured the ground in front with the fact that the further I went forward the fewer of our men I saw; and there seemed to be such furious firing of guns both right and left, in fact everywhere.

But I must not in any case lose my Regiment. If I did I should get neither a billet or anything to eat, have nothing to change into if I got soaked to the skin, and deserve to be severely ticked off for not being with them in the midst of some important engagement. Perhaps they were at that very moment charging back—through the streets of Thulin towards the canal, leaving their wounded behind them; and I should have

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been there to look after them. It was all very disturbing.

Nor could I understand, being under the impression that the German Army was on our right near Mons, why there was so much firing going on on our left in the direction of Rombies. And I had ordered the ambulance wagons full of wounded to go as far as Rombies and then turn to the left and make for Sebourg. Perhaps I had made an awful blunder and ordered those ambulances, with Porter and all the others in them, right into the thick of a battle! I felt I was making a complete muddle of the morning. Yet everyone I asked seemed to be quite as vague as I was myself, if not more so. This was already the third time I had been left 'out in the blue' in less than twenty-four hours. I felt convinced I ought to ride back towards Thulin, yet I did not want to share what I already suspected was Middleton's fate that morning, and get taken prisoner.

Now having, rather ignominiously as I felt, turned tail, I tried first of all to ride across country, south and east, thinking if some parts of the Brigade had really retired that I might intercept them. But I saw no one but a few gunners; so I turned back again and tried riding in the direction of Rombies, hoping to overtake the loaded ambulance wagons. I could see that there were some British infantry moving in that direction. Then I got into a road that seemed to lead south and west, and kept on in that direction.

Sometimes I was in quiet country lanes, the bees humming in the hedges and scarcely a soul in sight; yet the violent shelling especially of the hillside eastwards on my left was continuous. Then the mystery deepened. At intervals past me through those lanes began to come riderless horses—cavalry and artillery—some with their saddles covered with blood, foam upon their necks, galloping terror-stricken as if pursued by furies. Then a

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moment or two later, especially in the fields on the left of the lane, one by one, then in twos and threes together, mounted men tore past, riding crouched down against their horses' manes, galloping as if they rode away from fear itself—heads bent, hearing nothing, giving no answer to my shouted questions. These panting figures speeding past and not answering were nightmarish. One or two of them were Hussars, but it was, in most cases, hard to tell their Regiment. Some of them were certainly field gunners, not cavalymen; that was even more puzzling. Where were their guns? Why had they left them? Gunners *never* leave their guns; and where were they riding to so recklessly? At a steady trot I pressed on after these flying phantoms that for some minutes passed me breathlessly at intervals. There was a strangeness about it that was almost unreal, I might have been dreaming.

Many times I stopped and, dismounting, climbed banks and walls to see what was going on around. The battery positions (on my left now) on the hillside above Wiheries were still being engulfed in white squalls of bursting shell. Far away behind on my right and to the westward I could see what I supposed were British Infantry retiring from half-finished trenches which had been cut in lines across the cornfields. It was plain that some very definite change had taken place, but what? There was nothing to be done but to ride on until I found somebody—some staff officer who could tell me in which direction the Cavalry had gone. Eventually, between Angre and Rombies I passed a Battalion (the 2nd I think it was) of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, entrenching themselves energetically in a cornfield, and then some of the 11th Hussars and 5th Dragoons, but they could tell me nothing. A long way further on, near Sebourg, were two

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infantry Field Ambulances—about forty vehicles—halted by the roadside. They had been there, some of them told me, without orders for many hours and did not realize that a retreat had begun. It struck me, seeing how slowly such complicated units move, that they were in a precarious position. Afterwards I heard that both were captured late that afternoon.

About 4 p.m. I had overtaken several stray cavalrymen and Field and Horse gunners. Some of them, I guessed, were the men who had passed me so hastily on the road. I began to hear from them, both cavalry and gunners, the most depressing accounts of what had happened at Elouges; tales I rather discounted, it all sounded so unlikely.

Hungry—my last food had been on the previous evening—and impatient with what I thought were absurdly pessimistic tales, I rode on alone. Near an old mill, about a mile from Wagnies-le-Grand, I cut across country to a stream, the narrow wooden bridge that crossed it swaying with my horse's weight. On the far side I dismounted and let my horse plunge his nose in the stream. In this cool glade, though it was August, some yellow flags still bloomed, burrage and campion showed their blue and red flowers, plumed meadow-sweet scented the air. On some purple honesty a great golden brown fritillary—that as a boy I would have run miles to see—showed her silvery underwings. It all seemed so quiet here. That morning storm of shot and shell and those flying horsemen could surely not be real. Just a nightmare, an ugly dream like many of my recollections of the South African War. I rode up the hill into Wagnies-le-Grand thinking that perhaps anyway the War might soon be over—who could tell!

In the main street I ran into an old friend who was commanding a heavy battery—Elphinstone Dalrymple.

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He could tell me nothing about the cavalry—had not seen them. I gathered that he had not been in action. He was much occupied because in negotiating one of the very sharp turns on the hill in the narrow cobbled street of this little town one of his big guns had jammed skew-wise. He was lucky not to get captured that evening.

By about five-thirty, with a sergeant and three men of the 9th Lancers, I reached Wargnies-le-Petit. The little village was all in confusion; the inhabitants fleeing, most of the houses deserted, yet the whole place in a turmoil, thronged with the remnants of British cavalry, artillery brigades, and infantry stragglers. The village lanes were jammed with guns, supply and ammunition trains and transport of all sorts.

It was fairly evident then that at least as far as our Brigade was concerned there really had been a disaster. We were even told that our Commander, his Brigade now practically non-existent, much upset by the events of the day and anticipating censure, had offered to resign his command! Of the five hundred men of the 4th Dragoon Guards only about seventy or eighty could be mustered. The 9th Lancers, we understood, had suffered almost as severely as we had, and the 18th Hussars had also lost a good number. Everything appeared to be in confusion. But our regimental Headquarters, with whom I should have been all day, had apparently taken no part in the wild *mêlée* that was to be called a charge. Our Colonel, 'Dick' Mullens, with all his staff, was safe, including Solly Flood our second in command, Pat Fitzgerald, Denis Darley, signal officer and Oldrey, the adjutant. Our C.O. was calm, but that night he was indignant, sorely grieved, wondering *who* had ordered *his* squadrons into this disastrous affair? No one could say! He did not appear rattled, though nearly all his officers and three-quarters of his Regiment were missing. Only

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about seven or eight of our officers could be found that night, yet, including various attached interpreters and French officers, we had had thirty-two that morning. I learnt that evening that Middleton had been captured a few minutes after I had left him. As far as we could tell only about two hundred and fifty were left—of the entire Brigade.

Worn out—we had now had little real sleep for four days—myself and five other officers, after getting some food, climbed a ladder staircase into a narrow white-washed attic in which the hospitable old dame who kept the inn where we were billeted had arranged for us to sleep. Upon the floor, barely seven feet wide, six mattresses had been ranged in a line, six spotless little beds whose snow-white sheets and pillows seemed too good to be true after our experience of the last nine days. Mine was the nearest to the opening in the floor that led below; Captain Oldrey our adjutant was next to me.

I slept the sleep which the just are supposed to sleep but which the exhausted and dissipated are even more certain of. I heard as I dropped off some vague remarks about reveillé being at two-thirty. It was expected that by that hour the Germans would be almost on top of us. But I was too tired to even think about the morrow or to care very much what happened; and fell at once into a heavy, dreamless sleep.

Suddenly, someone was speaking to me in French! I awoke with a start—it was high dawn—my watch had stopped at half-past seven. The sun was shining brightly into the whitewashed little attic; *the other five beds were empty*. All about was an ominous silence!

Unable to believe my eyes or to collect my thoughts, I tried to think how I had come there. Then in the square opening in the floor which gave access to the ladder-like

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staircase I saw a head. Beneath a white sun-bonnet appeared the bronzed agitated wrinkled face of a very ancient dame.

'Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! M'sieur! Why have you not gone? The Germans are in the village! You must fly at once! Fly, or it will be too late!'

'Germans! But my comrades?'

'Your comrades, m'sieur, left many hours ago! All—all—all! In the darkness! The whole British Army! You must go at once, m'sieur, you and I will be shot as spies if you do not immediately go. Ah, m'sieur! This is too terrible! Go! Go! Quickly! Even now the Germans are in the street!'

With a sickening sense of guilt and disaster I seized my belt and accoutrements. Fortunately, we had all lain down fully dressed. I do not remember touching a single step as I shot down that steep narrow staircase. Outside there was only a hateful silence, a dreadful emptiness. The sun shone brightly up a deserted village street. A few birds sang in an orchard opposite. Except for the dust, the churned-up road, the torn hedges, the many odd pieces of equipment on the road—dropped or left behind in what must have been a very hasty departure—there was no sign of the British Army. A few yards to my left was a crossroad, partly concealed by some high hedges; to my right past the inn, looking northwards, the main street of the village ran for half a mile or so, white and deserted. There was no sign of my horse or my corporal whom I had regained the night before, only that fearsome silence and a sense of utter loneliness and desertion.

As I stood staring up the street, dazed and horrified at the hopelessness of the situation, a cloud of dust appeared at the far end and out of it emerged some horsemen. They stopped and dismounted, some entering the first

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house in the village. I heard a sound like a muffled shot. Then they came out again.

Germans! Part of their advance cavalry searching for spies and endeavouring to get information! Then two more shots rang out in another part of the village. Had they already found a spy?

And I? Obviously the Germans would think I was a spy who under pretext of being a doctor was remaining behind, hidden in an attic and perhaps in communication with English troops by telephone or heliograph. That at least was what it looked like. They would never believe my absurd story that I had overslept myself. Realizing this I darted back towards the inn again; but the old dame, probably one of the few inhabitants who had dared to remain because too old to fear or to fly, had bolted the door.

Out I ran into the road again. The cloud of dust was advancing and—there were more shots! I dashed to the crossroads to see if I could guess the direction in which our troops had gone; but the jumbled mass of hoof marks and wheel tracks gave no real indication. Suddenly I heard the sound of a motor bicycle approaching at full speed. I dashed back just in time to avoid being seen by a German despatch rider going full tilt in the direction in which I half suspected our Army had retired.

So I was *behind* the line of the German advance guard. Then it was quite hopeless! I had better walk boldly up to that German patrol and surrender. I had almost made up my mind to this, when I heard the quick pup-pup-pup of another cycle. It was odd, but this sound seemed more familiar than that of the first motorist. Peering through the hedge I could just see the head of the driver. To my joy he was wearing a khaki cap. Darting out to the crossroads I yelled at him. As he came towards me I recog-

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nized him; it was Drake' with his sidecar, one of the despatch riders attached to the Brigade; he was going all out. He stared at me in amazement, slowed down just sufficiently for me to throw myself into the sidecar, then on as if chased by demons.

'We are behind some of the German patrols!' he shouted as we sped along at a terrific pace.

I had realized that only too well, but felt too relieved to speak. We had luck; in only a few minutes of reckless going we were in touch again with the rearguard of the remnants of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. Everyone was too occupied even to notice our breathless arrival. English and German planes were overhead, and our infantry, Argyll and Sutherlands, were firing fruitlessly at both from a valley (Orsinval) just south of us.

Apparently, soon after we had turned in on the night before, orders had been received for the British Army to continue its retreat. The Brigade had left in the dark and owing both to the great number of casualties on the previous day and the haste and darkness, my absence had not been noted. My bed being nearest to the staircase the other five must have trampled over my body in making their hurried departure. It had never occurred to them that anyone could have been left behind fast asleep there. Annoyed with myself, I was too relieved at my lucky escape to nurse any grievance concerning their failure to rouse me. As things had turned out I had had probably three or four hours more sleep than anyone else in the British Army.

It is odd the way the same kind of adventure repeats itself. Bivouacked one late afternoon, fourteen years before, during the relief of Wepener, absolutely dead beat,

¹ I am uncertain of my rescuer's name. We had, I think, four or more motor-cyclist despatch riders, two of them undergraduates, attached to the Brigade.

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I lay down and dozed by my horse, to wake and find the camp deserted, darkness coming on, and myself and my whinnying horse alone on the wide and trackless South African Veldt. Beneath the rows of our abandoned and unemptied tea-dixies the camp fires still smouldered; forgotten nosebags, straps and picketing-pegs littered the ground. A surprise attack by the Boers, and my regiment had gone; and I sleeping peacefully by my horse, tired out, had heard neither friend nor enemy thunder past.

CHAPTER IV

LE CATEAU

(August 25th, 26th, and 27th, 1914)

The British Army was now in full retreat. The French Armies on either flank had been, we understood, more severely handled than ourselves. If they fell back more rapidly than we, thus leaving the British Army exposed on both flanks, they could not be held entirely to blame. Somehow we appeared to have lost touch with them. Undoubtedly our retreat might have been even more rapid than it was had we known the country as well as the French Commanders did. Often our Brigades, even our units, were broken up, crossing and recrossing; parties of stragglers and odd lots of transport impeding each other's retreat and adding to the confusion which was almost inevitable after the results of the first two days' fighting.

Cavalry Regiments, consisting as they do of three squadrons—each squadron containing four 'troops' which might be, and often were, on detached duties—are from the very nature of their organization and duties far more liable to get separated from the main body of their brigades than infantry. In our own case it would be hard to say how many times the scattered troops and squadrons of the Regiment—reunited by design or accident—became again broken up into two or more detached parties, each ignorant of the whereabouts of the others. Sometimes our Colonel was with us and a whole squad-

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ron or more was missing; at other times the main body would be represented by less than a hundred men commanded by Tom Bridges or some other officer. On one occasion I took the trouble to jot down what our column consisted of—seventy Dragoons of C. Squadron commanded by Major Tom Bridges, a few odd men, trumpeters, batmen and myself representing the remainder of the Regiment and Headquarters. Behind us rode twenty or thirty of the 9th Lancers, half a squadron of the North Irish Horse, about a score of the 11th Hussars, a number of Horse and Field artillerymen and 18th Hussars, some mounted and some on foot, with a few infantrymen, mounted signallers and A.S.C., and nine French hay-carts full of the wounded which I had picked up *en route*. This queer column, we had commandeered also a French wagonette with a tattered hood to carry some officers' mess kit and food, reminded me of South African days.

Gradually many of those we had supposed killed or captured during the famous 'charge' on Shrapnel Monday came straggling back or were found by chance. As it turned out, though the 'charge' was proclaimed in the London press as 'an exploit of the 9th Lancers', we had lost more heavily than they.

Now began the really strenuous job which cavalry are called upon to carry out for a retreating army. We must delay the enemy's advance at all costs; we must prevent a frontal attack developing, lest our sun-wearied and footsore infantry, unable to continue their retreat, should be routed, perhaps entirely scuppered by German cavalry. At the same time we must prevent our guns and our lagging transport from being cut off. But, most important of all, thinned in numbers as we were, we must protect at all costs both flanks of the several divisions in retreat.

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From flank to flank, from dawn almost to dawn, by mighty zigzags across an embattled front our cavalry rode throughout that Retreat. From hour to hour through those long dusty blazing days of August we hung on till the last desperate minute, while the crawling infantry got clear, coming at any moment unexpectedly into action against German cavalry and horse artillery and then—most demoralizing of all—bolting back to take up fresh and hurriedly-chosen positions.

Under such conditions the place of the medical officer with a cavalry regiment was almost anywhere he chose to make it—anywhere he thought he was useful. Often I rode alongside Pat Fitzgerald at the head of the Machine Gun Section.

Our Brigade was acting as rearguard to the infantry and the Regiment every third day as the rearguard of the Brigade, and this Section, spitting out their streams of bullets was the most effective rearguard for the Regiment and thus often the hindmost of all. I do not know how many times they were nearly cut off during the retreat. On the day we got away from Wagnies-le-Petit we opened fire on the advancing Germans from the ramparts of the walled town of Le Quesnoy because two Regiments—one of them was the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Rifles—the men looking hot and evidently very weary and footsore, were being threatened from the West by German cavalry with their horse artillery. We bolted away from Le Quesnoy—only just in time—then dashing through some fields found that we were cut off by German cavalry on our right and by a gigantic hedge on our left. There was nothing for it but that several of us should seize the axes from the limbers and hack down the young trees that formed the hedge. We heaved away like demons, shrapnel very badly aimed coming over us. Some of it, our gunners told me, was from French and

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English guns the Germans had captured at Mons. Pat, full of Irish fire, led his Section that day out of one 'scrape' into another and then out again—at the gallop. We seemed to spend the greater part of that day, August 25th, intercepting German cavalry and horse artillery coming apparently from Valenciennes. They kept pressing in towards the left flank of our retiring infantry at Beaudignies, where we again lost our colonel and adjutant. Then we were in action again near Vendegies. Vertain was thronged with crestfallen French reservists, most unenthusiastic about the war. Long trains of French wounded in rough country carts without covers or medical orderlies blocked all the roads. Near three hamlets, Maison Rouge, Maison Bleu and Maison Blanc we were in action once more. An hour later in a thunderstorm we fell in with three of our other cavalry Brigades and over a wide open plain of stubble dotted with dark wheat-stacks our Brigades and regiments wheeled and galloped, formed and reformed in column of squadrons, the German horse artillery making ineffectual attempts to drive us back. Over the brown masses of surging horsemen charging across that rather dreary plain beneath a lowering sky on that sultry afternoon came white feathery bursts of shrapnel. The threatening sky, the restless symmetrical movements, the whole scene reminded me in some strange way of Milton's description of the legions of dark angels practising for giant warfare with St. Michael on the plains of hell. Anyway, the German Michael, for all his 'shining armour', did not like the look of things. By three o'clock his contemplated flank attack on our infantry had faded out.

It had been a hot thundery day. In between the drenching showers the glare and heat made the long march even on horseback most trying. What it must have been for the footsore infantry with their eighty-

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pound packs can be imagined. The air was moist and stagnant. The great Forest of Mormal, on our left as we retreated, seemed to cut off all the breeze. The long white dusty road that ran straight as a ruler for at least ten miles through the villages of Croix and Forest towards Le Cateau was a tedious finish to a trying day.

Though Major Tom Bridges and most of C. Squadron were still absent, we had recovered many stragglers during the day's march, but the Regiment now nearly up to half its strength again was to be thrown into fresh confusion in Le Cateau. As we approached the town at about five o'clock on the afternoon of the day before the famous encounter, the broad valley outside was swarming with British infantry digging trenches, if trenches they could be called. Certainly none that I saw could have been more than two feet deep, yet attack by the advancing German armies was expected within a few hours. Our infantry looked hot, weary and dispirited. I stopped and talked to some of them for a few moments. Apparently many had only just got out of the train where they had had no sleep for forty-eight hours because of the way they had been crammed in. What was much worse was that the entrenching tools, spades and pick-axes belonging to each unit had either not been sufficient in numbers or had been put in another train. Some assured me that the tools were actually in the train but had not all yet been taken out! Whatever the fact was, it was painfully clear that there were not enough tools. The men were already grumpy and despondent. They sensed the inadequacy of things, knowing that within a few hours they would be fighting the main German Army, undoubtedly then the finest in the world.

A doctor of one of the infantry battalions—evidently quite new to military service—came up and asked me what I thought he ought to do.

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'I cannot', he complained, 'possibly treat a single wounded man in those absurd little troughs they call trenches, because there would not be room. Where am I to go when the battle begins? Where am I to put my horse? If I have my aid-post up by those trees'—he pointed to the skyline about one thousand yards away—'the wounded cannot be brought to me nor can I get to them without my being the only exposed person.'

What he said, as far as I could judge by a hasty glance, was more than true. The miniature trenches appeared to be on the forward slope of the hill; obviously a bad position—anyone could see that. They could be swept by machine-guns, rifle-fire or shrapnel, for at this point the ground appeared to be overlooked to the north and eastwards—to the right. I could think of nothing except to make the rather hopeless suggestion that he should not bother too much about his horse but just tie it up somewhere—he would probably never see it again—and advised him to turn on immediately all his regimental stretcher bearers to dig a short deep trench about fifty yards behind his unit, big enough for him to work in, and roof it over with some gates or stable doors or hurdles, concealing the roof with clay and turnips—the ground around was part of a huge turnip field.

'But we have not got any spades and everyone is dead beat!'

They all certainly looked it, and depressed too.

I left him, thanking my stars that in spite of all the complications involved in looking after a cavalry regiment in a retreat, I was not going to be an infantry doctor—not anyway at Le Cateau.

The setting sun was lighting up the walls of the city as we rode through the town gate to take part in one of the worst scenes of confusion I have ever witnessed. The narrow main street of the town and the Grande Place was

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one seething, struggling mass of troops, refugees and transport. There appeared to be two streams of French Reserve infantry marching north. One of them told me they were going north-west towards Cambrai. The columns of French troops were separated by a torrent of excited refugees, fleeing southwards from the advancing Germans. The refugees were driving their cattle, sheep, pigs, geese and poultry and bringing in every kind and form of vehicle all they possessed, from their babies in arms to their grandfather clocks. Tired old women with their aprons full of ornaments and silver forks gesticulated and wept and fainted. There were men carrying mattresses and women dragging children. Cart-horses and bullocks, hay-carts, dogcarts, wagonettes and decrepit and reluctant motor cars were all jammed together in the most extraordinary confusion. In endeavouring to march against this stream, both lines of French Reservists had become hopelessly broken up, blocked by lines of stationary farm carts. Many French soldiers, sensibly enough, tired of waiting and pushing, squatted on the ground under the carts and smoked. On the other side of the streams of Frenchmen going north, ourselves and other dribblets of English cavalry and a few English infantry—why the latter, I don't understand—were attempting also to press south or rather south-east. We had been told Bazuel was our destination that night, but we never got there. We, too, were more or less mixed up with dribblets and streams of refugees. In addition, cross-streams of British infantry and French regulars, including some French cavalry, were attempting to thread their way eastward and westward from one side of the town to the other.

It all seems incredible now (I do not suppose the main street of Le Cateau can be anything like a mile in length; the town itself must be smaller than Oxford) but the

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4th Dragoon Guards who had entered the gateway, perhaps two hundred and fifty strong, took two and a half hours to reach the top of the town and then there were only about ninety of us left. In that wild scrimmage we had again lost our Colonel and nearly all the officers, who unlike Major Bridges, Lieut. Gallagher and Sir T. Hickman and several others had not already been 'missing' since Shrapnel Monday. That night only seven officers were collected at the little inn on the left-hand side of the road at the top of the town. We seven sat round the table and consumed one of the best and most gigantic omelettes I have ever set eyes on. Although the day had been so thundery and sultry and one way and another we had covered a good forty miles, our struggle through the welter of Le Cateau had actually tired us out more than the whole of that day's march. Our first line transport was lost, everything again was in confusion, nothing could be found, and there seemed to be no orders. Determined to get some sleep at last we all turned in, leaving the liaison officer and I think it was Harrison, 10th Hussars, who was attached to us as additional interpreter, to flirt with the two very seductive little maidens of about sixteen who had made us our giant omelette.

At dawn (August 26th) we bore away to the right, south and east towards Mazinghien, turning off the Bazuel Road close to our billet. Heavy firing began soon after dawn to the north of the town. In the first hours of the morning we kept on halting on high ground but could only get glimpses of the battle now begun. It was evident from the heavy gunfire that the men in those furrows in that sun-baked turnip field were having a thin time.

In spite of some sleep, I was still dead tired and cannot say that I at all appreciated what was happening. The firing seemed to me to be coming from two quite differ-

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ent directions, and our restless zigzag movements from one flank to the other made one lose all sense of direction; it was one of the days we covered nearly sixty kilometres. I remember that we passed through Mazinghien and Ribauville and then La Vallée Mulatre—where we halted—Bohain, Beaufort—another long halt—Le Catelet, Hargicourt and Templeux-le-Guerard. Often we passed twice through the same village.

Our C.O., whom, with about a squadron, we recovered a day or two afterwards, though generally confident, always seemed rather depressed about the events at Le Cateau. He and some of the other portions of the Regiment lost in the scrimmage in the main street of Le Cateau had had a better view than we of the battle. One night, sitting at supper, he said to me: 'I saw last Wednesday something I thought I should never live to see—British infantry bolting out of their trenches like rabbits!'

He certainly did not intend it as a criticism of the men in those miserable little trenches, but as a reflection upon the impossible conditions under which they had been expected to fight. I know that having seen part of our infantry position before the attack I felt I should not myself have wanted to stay very long in those 'trenches' when they were being plastered with shrapnel and raked by German machine-guns.

All those hours while the battle of Le Cateau was being fought the fragment of the Regiment with which I found myself seemed to be but a restless spectator. We listened with uneasy hearts to the ominous pounding of the guns, first east then west.

We had had a taste ourselves of the weight of a German attack. Magnificently mounted as we were and comparatively fresh and safe, we could not but feel de-

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pressed at being so seemingly useless during those critical hours.

Possibly, our mere presence, the restless zigzag movements of the many small parties of our cavalry prevented the German cavalry from pressing on and doing what they might so easily have done—should by all military canons have done—completely mopping up the remnants of the two divisions, particularly the 4th, that had made a stand and then broken rather hopelessly at Le Cateau. Certainly the numerous small columns of British cavalry dispersed as we were must have given the German spies and aviators quite a false impression of our strength and ubiquity.

We had some sleep at Templeux-le-Guerard, then we were off before dawn. Joined by some stragglers from the 9th Lancers we rode through Bellicourt towards Le Catelet and then to Le Verguier—again we were zig-zagging—retracing a good half of the long march of the previous day. And then a long halt.

About three o'clock that afternoon (August 27th) we moved off definitely southwards. Presently I was dismounted attending to two wounded infantrymen full of very gloomy tales.

'Where is your own doctor?'

'Doctor! Blimey! We ain't seen no doctor. We ain't seen anyone since eleven o'clock yesterday morning!'

'But your regiment?'

'All gone—Colonel and all!'

'Gone?'

'Yes, killed, wounded, captured!'

'Ooked it,' suggested the other one brightly.

'What Division are you?'

They thought the 4th. I disbelieved them, not even knowing then that the 4th Division was in France. The

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two were only slightly wounded, and I was inclined to doubt their whole story.

I began to be stopped continually and questioned by wounded men with splints ill-adjusted and slipping tourniquets. Now and again I came upon groups by the side of the road zealously and over-anxiously trying injudiciously to revive some comrade faint from loss of blood. Busy with wounded I was soon in my usual dilemma, for the remnant of the 4th Dragoon Guards I had spent the night with had cantered on, and I had not the vaguest idea in which direction they had gone. Roads were no guide to Cavalry movements, more often than not we rode straight across country, avoiding all roads, circling and doubling first one way and then another. Fortunately I had a map, and as it was fairly obvious, orders or no orders, that the British Army was again in full retreat, I decided I must ride with the setting sun on my right hand and so keep southwards—Pariswards.

The hot, sultry, dusty afternoon wore on. Every moment or two I was involved in tragic-comic conversations with stragglers—men in twos and threes limping or slightly wounded; all asking for instructions. Once I came across a group of dismounted Staff Officers unshaven and haggard, standing disconsolately in the centre of the road. One I recognized, he had been Artillery Instructor in 1913 to eleven batteries of Field Artillery at Rollestone Camp on Salisbury Plain. I rode up to him.

'Hallo, Blank!' He looked up as if he did not see me, his face a mask. 'You're looking a bit glum. What's happened?'

'Glum! By God! Happened! Do you know what *has* happened? Our Division (the 4th) has lost thirty-seven guns and seven-eighths of our infantry!'

I rode on, scarcely believing my ears. This! Surely

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the worst blow we had received since Lord Cornwallis surrendered an English Army to the American revolutionaries at York Town! But I was soon to have sufficient proof that, anyway, seven eighths of the cohesion of the Division, if not of its personnel, had been completely broken.

The stragglers became more and more numerous: threes and fours, sixes and sevens, tens and twenties, generally without officers. Some were in parties of thirty or forty, looking absolutely worn out but making a gallant but rather pathetic attempt to march in military formation and with one or two sergeants or officers—sometimes with only a tired, dusty pale-faced subaltern—limping along with them. Mostly they had no packs, many had no rifles and seemed to be going haphazardly in any and every direction. The pale strained faces of the officers, walking dejectedly, their eyes fixed upon the ground, were only too obviously proof that something had gone *very* wrong. Some were so depressed they seemed unable to speak, the whole party straggling along in dead silence. Others I passed or met—for detachments were marching in all directions—stopped and asked me for news or orders. Even officers considerably senior to myself did this. That itself was disturbing. The fact that I was well mounted and, in spite of various adventures, had up till then managed to shave and keep fairly clean, probably misled some of them into thinking I was a Staff Officer. I had been in no danger that day and was not then specially fatigued, and having purchased a good map of Northern France on the day we landed at Boulogne, was fairly confident of my direction.

‘Where are we to go?’ a Major leading about thirty dispirited men would ask me. ‘We are all that is left of the 2nd Blankshires. Should we not all make for the coast?’

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I told him I had lost touch with my own unit and was making for St. Quentin, believing one or more of the Cavalry Brigades were falling back in that direction.

'But which *is* the road to St. Quentin—we have all lost our maps, lost everything!'

I showed him my map. Trotting on in another lane I met a subaltern with about fifty men. They also believed that they were all that was left of the same Regiment and were incredulous, almost disturbed, when I assured them they were not. Five privates blackberrying, without caps, packs or rifles, declared they were all that was left of the 2nd Whiteshires and had had nothing to eat for forty-eight hours. Ten minutes afterwards at a crossroad I came upon a group of men who had taken off their socks and were washing out their boots in a brook. In several cases their feet were terribly sore and bleeding.

'Who are you?' I asked.

'We are all that is left of the 2nd Stormshires and the 1st Blackshires!'

I pointed out to them a line of blazing villages. 'The Germans are not far behind, you must press on.' They took no notice whatever—one of them began singing 'Clementine'.

*... Herring box-es without top-ses
Sandals were for Clemen-tine.*

'The English soldier is never really beaten'—this and many of the other fine things that are said of our Army are really true, but no one need suppose that there were not many in our ranks in 1914 who were not 'pricking for a soft plank'. Some of those unarmed stragglers were evidently not unwilling to be 'found' by the Germans. Once taken prisoner under circumstances for which they could not very strictly be blamed, they would naturally

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think themselves safe; at least safe from being roused at three o'clock in the morning; safe from forced marches in the heat and rain with an eighty-pound pack on their backs; safe from any more pitched battles with the possibilities of death or mutilation. If they could get taken prisoner early in the War, they would avoid all the strain and fatigue, and at the end of armageddon they would be, likely enough, amongst the few uncrippled survivors.

In England the ranks of the Regular Army had always been a refuge for the man out of work, the man with no friends and no prospects, for the boy who could not find a job and had neither the energy nor the initiative to make one for himself, for the healthy man who was not a blackguard but a failure in civil life because he could not fight successfully against his fellows in a sternly competitive world. So it followed that many 'fighting men by trade' are anything but 'fighting men by temperament'. It was easier in 1913, even if you hated fighting, to enlist as a 'sodger' than to fight your own way in an overcrowded labour market. After all, the recruit believed in 1913 there might never be another war and so not much need for either courage or the fighting instinct. Certainly in pre-War days these men had not a great deal to fight for. Their country gave them social inferiority as a tradition, economic inferiority as a habit, subjection to a social system in which the hardest driven were almost invariably the worst paid and least thought-of, as their birthright.

The disorganization after Le Cateau must have been to many such as these a temptation. Suddenly released from all discipline, with no adjutant or sergeant-major to shout or threaten, in a strange country where no one could report them or give them away; footsore, without food, rather terrified after their first experience of a pitched battle, weary and 'fed up', they could hurl their

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burdensome packs into the nearest ditch and wait until the German advance patrols—cyclists, perhaps—would arrive and they could comfortably surrender. Anyway, they had not had a decent night for a week and they would as Prisoners of War at least get some sleep and have no one to bawl at them for being out of step or because their buttons were not polished. Perhaps prisoners of war would be allowed to play on their Jew's harps:

*... and her feet ... were number 'nine'
Herring box-es without top-ses
Sandals were for Clemen-tine.*

For me Le Cateau will always suggest that tune—and ripe blackberries.

Here and there in orchards and lanes were men asleep, apparently exhausted. In only a few cases empty bottles that had obviously contained white wine lay beside them. Overcoats and equipment strewn the roads and ditches; no one seemed to have any maps or any sense of direction. Meanwhile the smoke of burning villages blackening the skyline drew ever nearer. The Germans were advancing and their cavalry might at any moment be within lance length of these picnicking and blackberrying parties.

It was easy and rather presumptuous perhaps—well mounted oneself—to direct, encourage and advise footsore infantry, when I really knew no more of the situation than those who asked me for advice. It happened I could speak a little French, and with a good civilian map had a fairly definite plan of what I was going to do. I persuaded myself that in any retreat the British Army must fall back southwards, and not westwards towards England, tempting though that direction seemed; be-

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cause, having started the Battle of Mons such a long way from the sea, on a front running roughly west to east, to have retired westwards towards England and the English Channel, which many of the officers I spoke to suggested and even urged that we all ought to do—and several evidently were doing this—would have involved the obvious danger of retiring *across the front of the advancing Germans*. Also I had always loved Paris, and there was something deliciously simple, pleasantly safe and entirely attractive about retiring south—and to Paris, of all places! With memories of the scorched and desolate veldt in the South African war (the Boers deliberately fired the grass as they retired), a 'retreat to Paris' sounded almost too good to be true. The Chocolate Soldier in an *opera comique* war would certainly manage somehow to end by bivouacking in the Bois de Boulogne, after a *pas-de-quatre* with Suzanne, Raymond and Michel in the rue Vauvin.

I found myself in good spirits, jogging along with my pockets full of ripe apples, almost hoping that the Germans would keep on pushing; in which case we might be in Paris in about a week—little thinking that much of the Paris I had known and hoped to see again had already disappeared. Stragglers I encouraged when they assured me they were 'all that was left', by telling them I had just passed their colonel and two subalterns and over a hundred men of their regiment marching in good order. This, though sometimes an exaggeration, was, I thought, sufficiently near the truth; anyway, it would induce them to make some attempt to avoid capture by the Germans and rejoin their unit.

'Making for the coast!' A perfectly natural inclination for an Englishman in difficulties in France. But was it not rather burning one's boats! A martinet General might even decide that it was desertion! In spite of the

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fact that several parties seemed determined on this adventure one could not help wondering if they had considered the chances of being overtaken by the advanced screen of German cavalry. Also, straggling remnants of the British Army 'making for the coast' would have a demoralizing effect on the French peasantry, whom we had all been at such pains to reassure as much as we could during the last two or three days.

'Why are you retiring again, messieurs?'

In our pidgin-French we had answered: '*Nous reculons pour mieux sauter—pour englober les Allemands.*'

This, of course, was sheer bluff, the wish being father to the pretence. Obviously, no one could have had any inkling of the perilous mistake the Germans were to make a week later and the plans this mistake would suggest to General Joffre and what was to happen at the Marne. Still, our bluff had a reassuring effect in the French villages and, repeating it so often, one had begun to almost believe it oneself. '*Englober les Allemands.*' Yes! Of course, later on—we *might*. But what a prickly mouthfull!

Afterwards I heard that several of these parties did finally reach the coast after many adventures, leaving many stragglers footsore and uncertain in the villages *en route*—where some of them were reported to have taken an unduly prolonged rest-cure of several weeks.

I had not been subjected to the same fiery ordeal as these brave but worn-out and bewildered men; that was one reason why 'making for the coast', which sounded so far away, did not appeal to me.

That long August afternoon drew on. I was now between Fresnoy and Pontu. Tired as I began to be of the endless questioning and explanations, of stopping to lend my map and to discuss routes with parties of stragglers, I was impressed at the airy casual way in which the

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British Army was retiring after what had evidently been a severe defeat. It was also cheering to note the failure of the German cavalry to come on and mop us all up. If they had been as good as their infantry our retirement would have been an unpleasant affair. Though the Retreat from Mons was in reality degenerating into a rout, there was little sign of fear or of panic. On a baking August afternoon, when your mouth is choked with dust, your boots perhaps half-full of blood, and your stomach empty—except for white wine—and you have not had a decent night for a week, few will really show fear. It is the wealthy contented, comfortable person who gets so easily, unreasonably and absurdly frightened; the Russian Bolsheviki were to learn that. The overtired, overworked infantryman does not care much what happens to him—rather hopes he *will* be taken prisoner or shot and so escape once and for all from the endless fatigue and hunger and the irritation of contradictory orders, the misdirections and uncertainties of war.

The panic-talk about 'the whole Regiment wiped out' was the pessimism of boredom and extreme fatigue, not the depression of nervous fear. There were, of course, 'the Angels of Mons'. With so much nervous exhaustion, a hot sun beating down, and white wine on empty stomachs it was fortunate our men only saw angels. Did not a supposed pillar of fire by night and of smoke by day guide the retreating Israelites on their way to the milk and honey of a Canaanite Paris? And a pair of their intelligence officers actually brought back a large bunch of grapes. Perchance the armies of Moses also drank the wine of the country on stomachs none too well filled.

As I reached Gricourt, a small village on the main road to St. Quentin, the sun was setting. Behind me the villages of Pontru and Bel-Englise were already in

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flames, set alight possibly by German guns. More often than not the villages and houses in France took fire owing to accidents caused by the panic-stricken departures of the inhabitants. I once witnessed a fire beginning which I could easily have arrested had I had the time. The Germans were close upon us, but some tempting plums in a little garden induced me to ride through it and snatch a few of them as I passed. As I did so I saw through the cottage door a large towel-horse covered with linen all ablaze; it had fallen against the stove—upset, I supposed, by some panic-stricken refugee who had fled, loaded with bundles of valuables or with her apron full of her household goods. Later, we halted down the road and loosed off our machine-guns at some advancing German cavalry. I crouched behind a wall with Pat Fitzgerald and noticed then that several houses in the village in which I had stolen the plums were by that time well alight. It would have been natural to suppose that intentionally or accidentally this village fire was the work of the advancing Germans; it just happened that I knew in this instance it was otherwise. It must surely often have been so; for as villages make such comfortable billets, the advancing Germans would naturally wish not to burn them down but to preserve such good billets for their own sakes.

At Gricourt I found Pat Fitzgerald again with one of his machine-guns, the other having gone west in the scrimmage in Le Cateau's narrow streets. With him were about fifty of the 4th Dragoon Guards. In luck again, I was just in time to get into the village before the barrier of ploughs, harrows and old carts which our men were piling up, had blocked all the roads leading into it. I remember that Macgillicuddy, 'Foxy' Aylmer and, I think, Johnny Holman were there, rather surprised to see me appear from the direction in which they had already

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seen a patrol of German cavalry. Riding along munching apples, I had again been blissfully unconscious that I was behind the rearguards of the British Army.

We hung on at Gricourt, but things began to look unpleasant. To the right and left, the right especially, we could see the German cavalry patrols gradually encircling us. One troop got some orders and left us, and we were now reduced to about thirty men. Presently, General De Lisle with Hamilton Grace, his Brigade Major, following came galloping up.

'Our infantry in St. Quentin are in a tight place! You must hold on here at all costs. Whatever happens you *must not leave* before 6 p.m.' Saying this, the General wheeled his horse about and galloped off, I thought, in the direction of St. Quentin. The finality of his order with all those fellows creeping round our flanks was distinctly depressing. With a feeling almost of annoyance I watched him and Grace disappear. Why, in less than half an hour if the German cavalry knew their job we should be surrounded! I was tired and cold-footed, and found myself cursing and fidgeting, looking at my watch or planning a new line of retreat about every five minutes. To pass the time, I rode a little way up the slope behind us and looked back longingly at the spires of St. Quentin, perhaps five miles to the south of us. We had already covered that day in our continuous zigzag movements a considerable distance, at least another thirty miles, and I was beginning to feel frightfully weary and hungry. Apples after twelve hours on horseback are not very sustaining, and I loathed all this holding on to the 'last minute', and then bolting away pursued by German cavalry with their lances pointing in the small of one's back. It was more dignified to retire a little sooner and less hastily.

Everyone cordially agreed with my impatience.

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Gloomily I wondered if we should outwit the now close-drawn circle of Uhlans, who with tongues out were no doubt already panting for our blood.

At last our vigil was up. We wasted no time in shifting, galloping nearly all the way to St. Quentin. As we entered the town we slowed up disgusted to hear the sound of numerous shots coming from the centre of the town.

So, after all, the Germans were there already; we were too late! Surrounded! Wasn't that all De Lisle's fault? Cornered like this we must surrender. I followed our diminutive column slowly up the narrow streets towards the centre of the town: too depressed, hungry and weary to ask even the few inhabitants I passed any particulars about the entry of the Germans. At least as a prisoner of war I should be allowed to sleep—and that was now all I cared about.

After the Charge on Monday, August 24th, Major Charles Hunter, Colonel David Campbell, Captain Hardress Lloyd, Lieutenants Featherstonhaugh, Railston, Wright and Chance and some other officers with about ninety men of the 4th Dragoon Guards and 9th Lancers being unable to find the remnants of the Brigade spent the night of the 24th in Bavai, the night of the 25th in Ligny and the day of the 26th west of Le Cateau. On the night of the 26th Lieutenants Wright and Chance with two troops, remained in the open as a rearguard between Le Cateau and St. Quentin. In the evening of the 27th, they rejoined a portion of the 4th Dragoon Guards in St. Quentin.

CHAPTER V

ST. QUENTIN'S EVE

As we turned into the Grande Place at St. Quentin on that late August afternoon not a single German was to be seen. The whole square was thronged with British infantrymen standing in groups or wandering about in an aimless fashion, most of them without either packs or rifles. Scores had gone to sleep sitting on the pavement, their backs against the fronts of the shops. Many exhausted lay at full length on the pavement. Some few, obviously intoxicated, wandered about firing in the air at real or imaginary German aeroplanes. The great majority were not only without their arms but had apparently either lost or thrown away their belts, water bottles and other equipment.

There must have been several hundred men in the Square, and more in the side streets; yet apparently they were without officers—anyway, no officers were to be seen. On the road down to the station we found Major Tom Bridges with part of his squadron and a few Lancers, horse-gunners and other stragglers who had attached themselves to his command. We followed him down to the station. Apparently some hours before our arrival the last train that was to leave St. Quentin—Pariswards—for several years, had steamed out, carrying with it most of the British General Staff. A mob of disorganized soldiery had collected at the station, and I was told some had booed and cheered ironically these senior Staff

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officers as the Staff train steamed out. Certainly many of these Infantrymen appeared to be in a queer, rather truculent, mood. Bridges, who had sized up the situation, harangued this disorganized mob that only a few hours before had represented at least two famous regiments of the 4th Division.

Dismounted and standing far back in the crowd I could not hear what he said, but his words of encouragement and exhortation were received with sullen disapproval and murmurs by the bulk of those around him. One man shouted out: 'Our old man (his Colonel) has surrendered to the Germans, and we'll stick to him. *We don't want any bloody cavalry interfering!*' and he pointed his rifle at Bridges. I failed at first to understand how all these English soldiers could have surrendered to the Germans whom we had left several miles outside the city. But I was tired and hungry and I didn't much care what happened. Losing interest in what was taking place at the station I rode back up to the Grande Place, hoping I should find some food and a sofa on which I could lie down. As I rode up from the station many of the men in the street stared at me disdainfully, their arms folded; scarcely one saluted—I was for them only 'one of the bloody interfering cavalry officers'. The events of the last three or four days had evidently diminished the prestige of the officer caste. I began to wonder whether Bridges would be really shot if he continued his harangue at the railway station. In the Grande Place I seemed to be the only officer, the only other mounted men being stragglers of the Lancers, Irish Horse, Hussars, field-telegraph men of the Royal Engineers, and a few Signallers and Horse Artillery.

I tied my horse to a lamp-post, intending to find a shop where I could buy some food and get permission to lie down. But nearly every shop was closed or else the door

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was blocked by an indignant proprietor and his wife who insisted, as I was an officer, that I should go in at once and clear out the English soldiery who had entered and were lying asleep in the bedrooms and passages, and in some cases had helped themselves to food.

'Your men are all drunk, will you order them out of the house? I have young daughters in my house—the men have entered my kitchen—it is disgraceful! Why is there no order? Why are there no officers? Your troops have been here for hours and up to no good; please order them to go away!'

'It is all your fault,' I said angrily, 'I have seen your people giving our tired men white wine to drink; and you know they can have had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours. Why on earth do you not give them all some bread and butter and make them some coffee?' They looked at me in amazement. French peasants will often give wine away—but who ever heard of a French shop-keeper giving away *butter*!

The townsfolk were exaggerating—only a few of the men were drunk. Certainly in nearly every house and shop I entered there were a few English soldiers. Even in a chemist's shop where I tried unsuccessfully—the proprietor was merely rude—to buy some soap, two British soldiers were lying fast asleep, not on, but underneath the couch in the chemist's back parlour. But I saw few actually drunk. Eventually I got some bread and a bottle of white wine, and to avoid the recriminations of the shop people I decided I would sleep out in the Grande Place as so many men were doing. The pavement looked hard and the cobblestones in the square too uneven. Eventually, for the first time in my life—may it be the last!—I decided to sleep in the paved gutter which looked dry and cleaner than the road. Rolling up my Burberry for a pillow I lay down in the

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gutter close to my horse and must have slept for an hour.

When I awoke it was dusk, and two or three officers of the 4th Dragoon Guards were in the square with Bridges. Apparently, Bridges was having an interview with some official—I believe, the Mayor of St. Quentin—urging him to provide horses and carts to take those of our men who were too sore-footed to be able to march out of the town. I walked over to listen. As far as I could understand, the official—Mayor or whoever he was—was very indignant; he kept on saying:

‘You understand, m’sieur le Majeur, it is now too late. These men have surrendered to the Germans?’

‘How? The Germans are not here!’

‘Their colonel and officers have signed a paper giving me the numbers of the men of each regiment and the names of the officers who are prepared to surrender, and I have sent a copy of this out under a white flag to the Commander of the approaching German Army!’

‘But you have no business, m’sieur, as a loyal Frenchman, to assist allied troops to surrender!’

‘What else?’ urged the Mayor. ‘Consider, m’sieur le Majeur, the alternatives. The German Army is at Gri-court? Very well, I, representing the inhabitants of St. Quentin, who do not want our beautiful town unnecessarily destroyed by shell-fire because it happens to be full of English troops, have said to your colonels, and your men: “Will you please go out and fight the German Army *outside* St. Quentin,” but your men they say: “No! We cannot fight! We have lost nearly all our officers, our Staff have gone away by train, we do not know where to. Also, we have no artillery, most of us have neither rifles nor ammunition, and we are all so very tired!” Then, m’sieur le Majeur, I say to them: “Then please if you will not fight will you please *go right away*, and presently the Germans will enter St. Quentin peacefully; so

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the inhabitants will be glad to be tranquil, and not killed, and all our good shops not burnt." But they reply to me: "No, we cannot go away! We are terribly, terribly tired. We have had no proper food nor rest for many days, and yesterday we fought a great battle. We have not got any maps, and we do not even know where to go to. So we will stay in St. Quentin and have a little rest!" Then I say to them: "Since you will neither fight nor go away, then please you must surrender." So I send out a list of those who surrender to the German Commander, and now all is properly arranged!

Arranged! Yet the logic of this argument was irresistible—but for one point, which Bridges had quickly seized upon. The men *could* be got away if every horse and cart in St. Quentin was collected for those men too tired to march; his cavalymen would escort them out of the town. So the shops and streets would be cleared of tired and drunken men, and there would be no more firing off of rifles; but there was to be no more of this wine, only tea or coffee and bread.

So eventually it was arranged; Bridges had saved the situation which though bad was understandable. Disorganized stragglers had arrived by the hundred, many out of sheer fatigue having thrown away their packs and rifles. They had tramped beneath the blazing August sun with empty stomachs, dispirited and utterly weary; many had received quantities of wine from kindly French peasants to revive them in those dusty lanes. Literally, in many cases their bellies were full of wine and their boots were half full of blood; that I saw myself. The English soldier's feet like his head, but unlike his heart, are not his strong point.

To me it seems there was every excuse for the two colonels and the one or two pale exhausted-looking subalterns whom I had noticed mingling with the crowd down

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at the station. Without Staff, without maps or orders, without food, without ammunition, without support from artillery or cavalry, what *could* the remnants of broken infantry do before the advance of a victorious army, whose cavalry could have mopped them up in an hour? Probably, looking back on it now, the two colonels did almost the only thing feasible and the brave thing. Middle-aged men, both of them looked utterly exhausted. From their appearance they were suffering severely from the sun; that alone might account for their not having thought of making use of the Mayor as a collector of country carts.

So Bridges sent the remnant of his squadron round St. Quentin to encourage and collect in the square as many as possible of the infantrymen who were willing to join us in making their escape. The shots in different parts of the town still continued. Perhaps a few drunken soldiers were still having an imaginary wrestle with the 'Angels of Mons' or something more repulsive; white wine can raise many images. Or did some of Bridges's squadron shoot a few who too truculently scorned their suggestion that there was still time to run and fight another day?

Bridges asked me to count the men who were collecting in the Square and get them into fours. I counted one hundred and ten fours—that is to say four hundred and forty men. Then he asked me to do something else, I forget what it was. A few men had whistles and Jew's harps, perhaps they had them in their haversacks as soldiers often do, and they formed a sort of band. We persuaded one of the colonels to march in front of his men. My recollection is that he looked very pale, entirely dazed, had no Sam Browne belt, and leant heavily on his stick, apparently so exhausted with fatigue and the heat that he could scarcely have known what he was

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doing. Some of his men called to him encouraging words, affectionate and familiar, but not meant insolently—such as: 'Buck up, sir! Cheer up, daddy! Now we shan't be long! We are all going back to "Hang-le-Tear"!'

Actually I saw him saluting one of his own corporals who did not even look surprised. What with fatigue, heat, drink and the demoralization of defeat, many hardly knew what they were doing. I was so tired myself that I went to sleep on my horse almost immediately after I remounted, and nearly fell off, much to the amusement of some of the infantry who supposed I was as drunk with white wine as some of their comrades.

By this time it was quite dark. It seemed to have taken hours to collect the men, yet we did not move off. I began to feel quite sick with impatience. Overtired or sheer funk? What on earth were the German cavalry doing? At about five that afternoon they had been at Gricourt. We had held on there keeping them back until about six o'clock, and it was now nearly eleven o'clock, and Gricourt was but a few miles outside the town. Why had they not entered the town and mopped up this disorganized mob? Had they, informed by their aeroplanes of the situation, already encircled the town? Six hours was long enough for that.

It was nearly half-past twelve before we left St. Quentin. The sultry August day had passed to leave a thick summer mist. Our small army was at last collected. Every kind of vehicle had been filled with men with blistered feet. In front of them, on foot, were several hundred infantry, mostly of two regiments, but containing representatives of nearly every unit in the 4th Division, and behind, to form the rearguard to this extraordinary cavalcade, Tom Bridges's mounted column—the gallant little band of 4th Dragoon Guards with dribbets of Lancers, Hussars, Irish Horse, Signallers and the

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rest of the stragglers. In front of all rode a liaison officer and a guide sent by the Mayor, and I think Tom Bridges. By his side, walking, armed with a walking stick, was one of the two colonels—a thickset man—who had surrendered. (The other had disappeared.) And immediately behind them the miscellaneous 'band' of Jew's harps and penny whistles. So through the darkness and the thick shrouding fog of that summer night we marched out, literally feeling our way through the countryside, so thick was the mist. At about two in the morning we had reached the villages of Savy and Roupuy. Just as we started to leave St. Quentin I woke up to the fact that my precious map-case was missing, and I had to return to look for it in the now deserted Grande Place. As for a moment I sat on my horse alone there, taking a last look round, I heard an ominous sound—the metallic rattle on the cobbles of cavalry in formation entering the town through one of the darkened side streets that led into the Grande Place.

The Germans must have entered St. Quentin but a few minutes after the tail of our queer little column disappeared westward through the fog towards Savy.

Why had they not entered before? One might have known instinctively that their cavalry would not venture into the narrow crooked streets of an ancient town like St. Quentin when their spies and aeroplanes and the panic-stricken inhabitants would inform them that British infantry in considerable numbers were in many of the houses. No Cavalry Commander would risk having his advance guard potted at from every attic window and roof. Clearly the Mayor's fears were justified. The only way to dislodge hostile infantry from such a city would be to surround and then shell it, or set it alight, and that almost certainly would have happened if Bridges had not arrived to captain those disorganized

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troops and lead them out, thus averting what historians would have had to record as either 'the surrender'—or destruction—of St. Quentin.

Not long afterwards, during the Battle of the Aisne, Bridges, who helped to save the last strip of Belgium, was promoted, eventually became a Lieutenant-General and later Governor of South Australia. If he should see this description he could doubtless correct it in many important details. I was too tired to take note of all that was happening, and may have given some of the events in their wrong order.

But the ordinary man, especially the soldier, will ask himself: 'What would you have done if you had been one of those two Colonels on that August afternoon, and found yourself with your men mostly disarmed and exhausted and no other officers?'

Supposing, having found a horse, you had called upon such of your men as were able to march and willing to follow you, and led them out of St. Quentin? Probably, because they were asleep in the houses, or exhausted and had no promise of carts and an armed escort of cavalry to support their morale and defend them from the Germans, the bulk of them would have remained in the town without any officer of sufficient rank to treat with the German Commander for their safety and good order and proper surrender as prisoners of war. What would have been the almost certain result of that? They would, most of them, have been massacred, and the town of St. Quentin would have been shelled and perhaps burnt to the ground to dislodge this rabble of dispirited and partly intoxicated hostile troops. In sticking to their men and not making good their own escape these colonels ruined their own careers; but yet really showed a more soldierly idea of comradeship in difficulty and danger than if they had fled, accompanied only by a small minority who would

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have been both willing and physically able to go with them. But even that would probably have been futile, for they would have been retiring with a small practically unarmed contingent of infantry in open country with German cavalry almost certainly hot on their heels! They must in the ordinary way have expected to be overtaken, exhausted as they were, early on the following morning, and would almost certainly have been either captured or massacred by enemy cavalry. No one could have counted on the German cavalry failing as they did to encircle the town. When to this consideration is added the facts that the General Staff had gone, and had apparently left no orders; that no one knew exactly in which direction to march and the colonels were physically exhausted themselves, it is surely plain that they could scarcely be blamed for giving their consent to the unusual course of surrendering to an enemy still some miles away. The ordinary layman will continue to ask why the General Staff who hurried away in the last train did not leave at least one or two senior Staff Officers behind to ensure the orderly evacuation of the disorganized troops, which they knew were already streaming into St. Quentin. To put it mildly, it looks as if the two colonels, as so often happens, were made the scapegoats for the want of imagination of the General Staff.

What made Major Bridges's action at St. Quentin seem so outstanding was that not only was he an officer of comparatively junior rank, but that his own unit, from stress of circumstances, was more or less disorganized. He was not only separated from his own Regimental headquarters, but had only about half his squadron and could not have had the least idea where further supplies of ammunition or food were to come from. Ignoring his own difficulties and lack of orders, he at once took com-

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mand of a most disturbing situation, a responsibility that considering the vagueness of the general situation many would have been unwilling to assume; and all the time, as I knew, he was suffering from the injury to the bones of his face which he had received on Shrapnel Monday.

CHAPTER VI

THE FOOT OF THE GOOSE

The next day (August 28th) between Roupy and Noyon we overtook many stragglers, mostly infantry, who joined us with our column. I had now a commando of my own, having commandeered about a dozen haycarts and farm wagons and filled them with wounded. With some vague old-fashioned idea of preventing the Germans 'capturing French flags' I had entered every deserted French Mairie in the abandoned villages as we passed through and 'rescued' from behind the Mayor's chair the gorgeous, gilt-fringed silk tricolour that hung there. I don't know how many I had collected, but the cart they were in was unable to keep up with us, and was captured near Chevrières with eleven cartloads of wounded I had collected *en route*.

Soon after starting we encountered a long ammunition train, about fifty or more lorries, gaily speeding towards the Germans; quite blissfully ignorant of the fact that a large part of the British Army, including the guns for which they were bringing up this ammunition, were either behind them in retreat or had been already captured by the advancing Germans.

It was Major Bridges, I think, who ordered these lorries to dump the whole of their ammunition into the Ham canal, and after being loaded with our footsore stragglers, turn round and make for Paris. More than one big ammunition column and hundreds of stragglers

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and slightly wounded men were saved in this way that afternoon. The ammunition disposed of would have been invaluable to the advancing Germans, who had already captured many of our guns; the lorries and the men saved helped us to win the battle of the Marne three weeks later.

Relieved of our charge of tired infantry we arrived about six that evening at the pleasant sleepy village of Le Plessis Patte d'Oie. *En route* we had overtaken and joined up with other remnants of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade that had themselves picked up many stragglers on each day's march, so the Brigade was once more fully up to half its strength. We had a job to squeeze our horses and ourselves into the numerous farm houses and barns of the village whose strange name, 'Foot of the Goose', describes the network of narrow country lanes which intersected there. The three horses belonging to myself, my corporal and groom had to be shifted to fresh stables several times before we settled down. There was some talk of moving off again at midnight, but eventually it was decided to remain for the night in the Foot of the Goose.

Dawn on the 29th brought another very dense August mist. All around was a cotton-wool silence, yet a strange panic had taken possession of the inmates of the farmhouse, in which about six of us (officers) were billeted. Long before sunrise the farmer and his family began feverishly to pack up; but the 18th Hussars' rearguard on patrol had sent us in no warnings—the fog obliterated all. The German Army, we supposed, had found it was advancing too fast for its supplies to keep up with it and was slackening its pursuit. We awoke with a comfortable feeling that we were going to have at least twenty-four hours peace and proceeded to make an elaborate and badly-needed toilet.

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About 7 a.m. several of us were in the kitchen of the farm, sorting out our kit and trying more or less naked to remove some of the grime of the past week. I was squatting on the floor with only a towel round my waist, trying to shave, before a piece of looking-glass propped up on a kitchen chair. Outside was perfect peace and a dense fog.

Suddenly a rifle shot sounded in the yard outside, and then another. None of us were disturbed—it was only the ‘usual damn carelessness’ of tired men who leave their magazines open and pitch their rifles about. A moment later there were two or three more shots. One of us got up and went into the passage to shout some words of reproach about this clumsiness. In a moment he—I think it was Macgillicuddy or Foxy Aylmer—burst in again shouting: ‘Look out! the Germans are on top of us!’

The scene that followed in the kitchen would have seemed very comic anywhere else. Somebody, I forget whether it was an officer or an officer’s servant, sat down hurriedly in a tin bath of hot water, just as an enemy bullet ricochetting from the brick gateway outside spun whistling through the kitchen window. Personally, I felt quite sick with fear and annoyance. My chair with all my shaving gear was knocked flying. Men with rifles came dashing through, their feet caked with manure from the farmyard outside, treading all over the clean linen I was about to put on. I cannot remember how I got dressed, but I found myself racing breathlessly up and down the confusing little lanes of the village in a thick fog, shouting for my corporal and groom. Everyone else seemed to be running and shouting too. The fog was very dense, and I could find neither my horse nor my groom. Meanwhile there was firing on all sides, shrapnel was coming over and quite a brisk battle going on in the newly-cut cornfield that adjoined our billet. I found

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I had to run back into this field to get into the farm again. I could just see in the fog our men crouching, two or three behind each pile of wheat sheaves, and blazing away furiously into the fog. The Germans were evidently working round our flanks while trying to hold us by a frontal attack.

I found two or three wounded men and got them behind a wall and dressed them. While I was doing this my corporal ran up and told me that my groom and our three horses were in another farmyard about a hundred yards away.

All this must have happened within five or ten minutes. We were being rapidly driven back, the German Horse Artillery was beginning to shell the rear end of the village in earnest, and the fire on both our flanks was increasing. Evidently we were already almost completely surrounded. Our men in the cornfield began to retire past us.

My groom, Hassell, and myself were late in getting away and found ourselves in a farmyard with a biggish ditch to jump in order to gain the lane beyond. Our horses, saddled up carelessly in the panic, were in an excited state a shell caused both animals to swerve together and jostle in the jump. I think the swerve did it for I felt my saddle begin to slip round as we jumped. The next thing I was aware of was that I saw Hassell lying apparently unconscious three or four yards away from me, and I was sitting up on the road holding my right shoulder which felt as though it was dislocated. Both horses had bolted. My saddle was in the ditch behind me, and such of my kit as I had saved in our rather panic-stricken exit from the farm and some of which Hassell had been carrying in his arms was scattered all over the road.

The village was now being plastered with shrapnel.

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We seemed to be the last two left—my usual luck! Hassell lifted his head:

‘Our horses! Gone?’

‘Yes, sir, and both my legs broken, or one is anyway.’

Still feeling rather dazed I hastily examined Hassell. There was no doubt one leg was badly broken, and I had doubts about the other. On the road I found two short arm-splints which had fallen out of the surgical haversack that he had on his saddle. I hurriedly put them on his leg. The road was getting too hot, so I carried him about thirty yards to the left where we sheltered in a ditch just outside the gates of another barnyard. He was a terribly thickset dumpy little man to carry, and my right shoulder now felt as if it was on fire. The buildings round us, most of them with thatched roofs, were all ablaze, including the barns beside us. Inside the high doors to this barnyard chained to a great log in the centre, a big black retriever watchdog—we had noticed him on our arrival the previous evening—howled in terror as the straw all round his log began to take fire. Had I not had Hassell to look after I think I would have tried to climb over and set him loose.

I put the splints on Hassell again rather more securely and as I did so I saw the black and white pennons of German Uhlans fluttering over the top of the hedge just beyond the barn.

I felt this time we really were done for. I had not even got my revolver, and I only hoped that in the thick fog they would not run us through with their lances before they realized that we were both unarmed and helpless.

Suddenly I heard a wild shouting. The mess-cart of the 18th Hussars officers, with three of their soldier servants, came galloping madly towards us from one of the lanes, of which four or five intersected near the point where Hassell and I had crashed.

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'Stop!' I shouted, running bang in front in desperation, and pointing to Hassell. The driver pulled his horse right back on his haunches, the dogcart swung round and nearly upset. I picked up Hassell in my arms and dropped him, broken leg and all, into the back of the cart, throwing my Burberry in on top of him; then they galloped off leaving me in the middle of the road. I have not the slightest doubt that their leaving me was unintentional; I was in fact so dazed that I had made no attempt to climb into the cart. What with the fog and their excitement and the smoke from the blazing farms and the shrapnel coming over we were none of us very clear what we wanted to do. Years afterwards I heard from one of them that, owing to the way they swung round as I stopped them, they galloped off not in the direction they had originally been going, but down one of the numerous lanes too much to the left, and driving straight into the advancing Germans were all immediately captured. Hassell wrote to me afterwards, I think, from Germany.

Left standing despairingly on the crossroads I heard a friendly shout. It was Trumpeter Green of the 4th Dragoon Guards, riding a stray horse—his own had been shot—and leading mine, which he had also caught astray.

'Quick, sir! Quick! But I can't find your saddle.'

I seized my saddle from the ditch, and in about five seconds, in spite of my damaged shoulder, Green had helped me on to my horse and we were galloping across country back towards a line of trees that marked the main road between Noyon and Ham. My head was spinning round, I felt sick. I could only use my left arm, my right I slung in a sling made from one of the blue silk scarves that several of us had purchased just before we left Tidworth, and I had lost everything, including my

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servant. Still, I had escaped once more. The Regiment was back about six hundred yards, lined up behind some hedges and outbuildings on either side of the main road. Some were cursing the 18th Hussars for—as they alleged—letting us all down. Green and I rejoined just in time. Fitzgerald had been holding back the advancing German cavalry with his machine-guns, saving the situation as he did many times that morning, but a moment after we reached him we were retiring down the main road again at the gallop.

Reduced and rather disorganized again by our latest misadventure we could not hold on for long at any point. Every couple of hundred yards or so down the road we swung round again to hold up the enemy. A dozen times we repeated this manœuvre and our machine-guns did most of it.

Practically all my medical equipment was lost as well as my razor, toothbrush, water-bottle and field-glasses. What use is a doctor without his surgical equipment? Practically none. Moreover, during the rapid and constant series of retreats on that day especially, it was impossible to dispose of the wounded. Now and again French refugees, mostly women in cars loaded up with crested family plate and other valuables, would turn from side lanes into the main road along which we were falling back, and dash wildly through our ranks, making their escape to Paris. I had to stop them, then leaving Trumpeter Green or my orderly to see they did not move, we picked up those of our men who were wounded, persuaded them as far as possible to get on to their horses and gallop back to the car. Arriving opposite the car—many of them in a half-fainting condition—we allowed them to topple or slide off their horses into the back of the car on top of the valuables, until we judged the car had a sufficient load, then we allowed the car to proceed.

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The drivers of the cars were furious at the delay. One big open car driven by two quite young girls refused to stop until I had backed my horse into the radiator. The girls, evidently wealthy and high-spirited, cursed and denounced me as a spy, weeping, abusive and hysterical. Bullets were actually striking the mudguards at the back of this car as we dumped into it Trumpeter Coventry and half a dozen other men whose names I have forgotten. Many of them were wounded in the groin or thigh, and I had ripped off their breeches in order to get at the bleeding. The two hysterical young women drove away in wild zigzag fashion, the back of their car a heap of half naked young men lying upside down on top of the family heirlooms.

Several carloads escaped to Paris; one unfortunately got a tyre punctured by a bullet just after we let it go. They struggled on as far as Noyon and were captured there by the Germans while they were attempting to repair the puncture! The risk in holding up any car on a road down which the Germans were firing almost justified the hysterical fury of the young women at being stopped. Yet it was the only possible means of getting the wounded away during such a rapid retreat. I don't know what we should have done that day without those stray cars.

As we retreated through Guiscard, things got very hot, many of our men falling wounded in the main street. The Germans were coming on fast, and there was no time even to dress them. I jumped down and urged those not too seriously wounded to let us help them on to their horses again and try to gallop back for a hundred yards or so where I should have a better chance of dressing them and getting them into a car.

'Oh, I can't, sir, I can't, I feel so faint!'

'Never mind, I and the corporal will ride on either side of you and hold you on.'

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This we had to do time after time.

Certainly it was extremely bad doctoring. They ought to have been dressed where they lay; but had I attempted to do so, I and my corporal and the trumpeter who was now acting as my groom and servant, as well as the wounded men, would all have been captured within the first ten minutes. Under similar circumstances, bad doctoring as it was, I believe one would have to do much the same again.

At the far end of Guiscard, about five or six men were wounded, and we dragged them into an archway, when the German firing suddenly stopped and someone shouted again: 'Look out! They're charging!'

Getting two of the men that were wounded on to their horses again, we had to gallop on, but we left three men unattended to in the archway. I cannot remember who they were, either Horse Gunners or 18th Hussars, I think. After one of these rapid gallops back, the Colonel suggested I should go back again with a white flag and try to recover all the wounded that had been left scattered about in the village of Le Plessis and all down the main road to the south of Guiscard. I own I was not enthusiastic.

'I will go back, sir—but I'm afraid they won't let me return to you, if I do. They may not even let me attend to my own wounded. I should merely go back to Germany as a prisoner of war. I'm afraid it would not be much use; but I will do it if you think it's worth trying.'

The Colonel did not say any more; I think he felt doubtful himself whether it would have been any use. I knew he was worried about losing so good an officer as Jim Sanderson, wounded miles back in the cornfield at Le Plessis. Would the Germans have ceased pressing their attack, would they have stopped their machine-gunners firing and lost a good chance of surrounding us

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and our artillery while I rode forward with a white handkerchief tied on a stick to 'look for wounded'?'¹

The series of rearguard cavalry actions finished at last. We were tired out, and the Germans, too, ceased their pursuit as soon as some more of our Horse Artillery batteries came to our support. Evidently we had been in contact only with the advance screen of the German cavalry—but quite enough for one day!

¹At Noyon the Mayor's Secretary, at my suggestion, organized a party of old peasants with whom we hoped the German was hardly likely to interfere, to go back with a cart as far as Le Plessis and look for Lt. Sanderson and all the others we had left wounded along the roadside.

CHAPTER VII

THROUGH PARIS—TOWARDS THE MARNE

(August 30th-September 5th)

From Noyon, with many twists and turns through Ourscamp, Carlepont, Tracy-le-Val, Choisy and Vieux Moulin, was really but a matter of days, yet seemed weeks. After a rough scramble north-east of the forest of Compiègne where the Germans were again threatening our right flank, we had spent many hours of the afternoon and evening searching the thickly-wooded and hilly part of the forest near Vieux Moulin. Many times my horse and I had floundered into bogs, or I had been bruised or nearly scraped off his back by dripping moss-covered boughs. Late that night, some of us, well in advance of the rest of the Regiment, arrived to billet at an imposing château in the woods. Ivy-covered, sombre, grey with age and surrounded with tall trees that swayed in the commencing storm, the immense building appeared uninhabited, but as we clattered through a paved archway into a rank gloomy courtyard, the owner, a distinguished looking old man, came forward to welcome us. Hearing that the colonel and officers of an English Cavalry Regiment were to be billeted in his castle, the owner, with an old serving-woman, almost as grey and bent as himself, had resolved to stay behind to do us the honours.

The old seigneur stood holding a lantern, making his apologies that for the moment there was no one but him-

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self to hold our horses. A welcome meal was ready for us in the banqueting hall, where on a long table crystal and silver glittered in the faint candlelight. As soon as we had eaten our host insisted on showing us one by one to our rooms, leading us with shaky uncertain steps up the broad staircase and along the dim and draughty corridors of the castle. When my turn came—I was one of the most junior—he took two of the heavy silver candlesticks from the table and led me to a distant wing and into a large chamber, the walls and ceiling lined with rusty brown leather, cracked and faded, with here and there faint traces of gilt fleur-de-lys stamped upon it. Outside, through the uncurtained windows, one could see clouds racing across the moon; the rising wind moaned and whined. The courteous old man stood with the candlesticks while I pulled off my field boots and accoutrements, full of regrets that the room was chilly and unaired, and when I had got on to the huge four-posted bed he carefully tucked me in beneath the quilted satin coverlet.

Standing at the bedside in the candlelight, with his close-trimmed, pointed beard and aquiline nose, he reminded me vividly of my father, who, over eighty, was at that moment, quite unknown to me, lying desperately ill with pneumonia. Not altogether liking the look of the vast gloomy apartment and rather fearing I might be left behind again, I begged him when he wished me 'Bon rêve' to leave the door open.

I do not believe in ghosts, but there were certainly strange happenings in that room that night; I suppose they may have been due either to the storm or to rats. To begin with, the wind caused the leather hangings to wobble and bulge, looking in the dim moonlight as if the room was getting smaller and about to close in upon me, whilst all about the vast mahogany bed, itself almost as large as a small room, went whispers and the sounds of

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little feet. Outside, the pale fingers of the night wind fumbled intermittently with the casements, while the restless ivy rustled as with the sighs of distant battle-fields. At last, still thinking of the almost uncanny resemblance of the old man to my father, I fell into an uneasy sleep, to dream I saw a small black coffin on a shabby hearse, drawn up in front of my father's house in Sussex. Through the leafless trees in the long avenue in which I stood, moaned an unending wind, which chilled my very soul. Rooted to the ground, I watched the hearse, astonished that I seemed to be the only mourner. Then something was stifling me—a hand, deadly tight, clutched at my throat. With a fearful effort I shook it off, awakening to find, not a hand across my neck, but my leather Sam Browne belt, which I could have sworn I had left upon a chair!

Hardly was I asleep again before the tired old man was once more beside my bed with the candles, looking to me now more than ever like my father's ghost. He and the old servant had, it seems, sat up keeping guard over us all night. Now they had bad news of another French reverse; the Germans were very near and we must be gone—he had coffee already prepared for us. It was still dark when we clattered off again through the dismal courtyard, the dear old man and his servant waving us God-speed. It was too late then, he told us, for them both to go. He would wait now, lantern in hand—for the Germans.

So we rode away and left them, I still rather weary and somewhat disturbed with my odd dream. My father was to recover, but yet that wretched nightmare was to become too painfully true in the years that followed.

At Compiègne, as we galloped across the broad stone bridge, our sappers sent part of it sky-high behind us,

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leaving our Staff Captain and a few Signallers on the wrong side, and consequently forced to dash southwards on the left bank of the Oise.

From Compiègne we pressed on through Chevrieres, Pont-St.-Maxence, Senlis and the woods of Ermenonville to the outskirts of Paris. The Germans were at Dammarville when we fell back again, their Uhlan patrols away out in some villages on our right. The sound of the German guns, though of comparatively small calibre, was already being heard in the Place de l'Opéra.

It was near Ermenonville that in the black embers of a burnt hayrick I found the body of an R.A.S.C. motor cyclist. There were six or seven lance wounds in his body; the blackened remains of his cycle I found afterwards on one edge of the still smouldering ashes. It was assumed for purposes of war propaganda that the Germans had overtaken him, wounded him in several places with their lances and then thrown him 'helpless, but alive' on to the burning hayrick. But there was in fact no real evidence of this. It was quite possible, as the wounds were only superficial, that the wounded man had crawled to the rick or had been laid on some of the hay either by his own comrades or some French peasants or German ambulance men. Had he tried to light a cigarette, or had the rick taken fire from his motor cycle which had apparently been left—possibly with the engine running—leaning against the hayrick? Or had the Germans deliberately set fire to the rick? And if so, why? For in war the wounding or the killing of an enemy is nothing to hide. At General de Lisle's request I examined the body. I tried to decide if the wounds had been bleeding at the time the skin was being charred. I could come to no definite conclusion on a hurried examination. I was interviewed in England in January, 1915, concerning this incident, by our Propaganda Department and

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'those Huns' got the benefit of this discovery. It was considered an example of 'Hun brutality' and a breach of the Geneva Convention for the care of the wounded.

Within a couple of hundred yards of the smouldering hayrick we came upon a Supply Column of British lorries halted but quite deserted; several lorries had their engines still running and most of them bore the marks of many bullets. What had happened? We never heard. It looked rather as if the lad whose body I had found in the hayrick, on seeing our convoy attacked by German cavalry, had made off at full speed on his motor cycle to obtain assistance, and had been overtaken by the enemy. Presumably the R.A.S.C. drivers of the lorries had all been captured or had jumped from their lorries and made off into the woods on either side of the road, and their captors, possibly only a small party, on our approach had made off too.

We halted nearby in the wooded grounds of a fine old château, where some of us had time to bathe in a basin fed by a wonderful fountain—the first bath most of us had had since we left Damousies, with its level orchards and pleasant brook, in which we had bathed three days before Mons. How long ago that seemed! The sunlit water in the great marble basin, clear and shallow, sparkled temptingly. It was idyllic to sit in the sun on the marble coping beneath the rainbow spray of the fountain and watch the tall trees swaying. Someone too lazy to strip and bathe persisted in dropping dark hints about a well known man who owned the place and whose tastes were ogreish, not to say peculiar, whereat Johnny Holman and some of the other subalterns hastily put on their clothes.

Reaching Gournay, just east of Paris, we heard we were to have a rest at last. It was scorching weather, but bivouacking in a field bordering on the Marne on the

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outskirts of this little town, only twelve miles from Paris, seemed too good to be true, and not being expected to be ready at any moment to move off was itself a rest.

As Major Bridges was still suffering from the effects of his fall on Shrapnel Monday, we got General De Lisle's permission to use his car to go into Paris, and, if possible, have the injuries to the bones of Bridges's face X-rayed.

It was a strange drive. The first enthusiasm for England and English military support had not yet cooled down; the rumble of German gunfire, now audible in the Paris streets, was a forceful reminder that that aid was invaluable, the moral support of the whole British Empire more than ever needed. I suppose we were some of the first British officers who had been seen after the ominous silence of the last ten or twelve days. As we approached Paris we were received with enthusiastic cheers for England and England's Army.

Approaching the Porte de Vincennes, it was plain that Paris was intensely alarmed, panic-stricken almost. Houses and factories outside the fortifications were being blown down with gun-cotton to clear the field of fire for the artillery and troops with whom, presumably, Paris proposed to man her ancient ramparts. Trees were being cut down on all sides to form barricades against cavalry, and the square granite cobbles were being torn up to form low walls—*schanzes* as we had called them in South Africa—to protect machine-gunners and riflemen. Trenches had already been dug on alternate sides half-way across the main roads into Paris, and our car had to zigzag through a series of hairpin bends to get past the fast-rising barricades.

Through the Porte de Vincennes we dashed on past Le Nation, La Bastille, and Place de la République. As we drew towards the centre of Paris the cheering increased; immense and anxious crowds thronged the

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raised pavements opposite the Porte St. Denis and Porte St. Martin, and as we passed raised a mighty shout of '*Vivent les Anglais*' and '*Vive L'Angleterre*'. Towards Place de l'Opéra the streets became blocked, a great part of the population of northern France seemed to be streaming through Paris to escape the onrush of the Germans. It was like a larger edition of the seething mêlée at Le Cateau, except that all now pressed in one direction. Down the Grands Boulevards, the Avenue de l'Opéra, rue de la Paix, the Madeleine, and the rue St.-Honore, poured an excited stream of refugees, some driving their cattle in front of them. Cows lowed and geese cackled, old men struggled with mattresses on their heads, and children carried chairs. One old woman, a baby on one arm and a chamber-pot full of tableware and small treasures under the other, scolded and gesticulated. That quarter of Paris had always seemed so luxurious and costly; it was queer to see these fashionable streets thronged with aged farm labourers with hayforks, and ducks and poultry. Farm wagons loaded with the humble furniture of the deserted farms of northern France were filling the roadway and even driving haphazard over the pavement.

Overhead a Taube and a French aeroplane were having a duel. Almost every shop was barricaded, and many talked of the coming siege of Paris; old folk who remembered the starvation rations and the rat diet during the siege of 1870 shook their heads.

Unable to find the radiologist for Bridges, we thought of food.

'The Café de la Paix,' I suggested—only a few yards away.

It was only about four o'clock, but the terrace outside this famous café had been swept clear of chairs and tables. The windows were shuttered; only the door was open.

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We made our way into the darkened and deserted interior. There was only the proprietor inside, busy locking up.

'Something to eat, m'sieur, if you please.'

'Ah, m'sieur, impossible! Already I go; there will be no more Café de la Paix from to-day! All—all is finished!' he sighed.

'Can't you give us something to eat or drink at all?' I begged. 'We won't stay long—an egg perhaps?'

'Ah, m'sieur, an egg!' The full tragedy of the situation seemed to come home to him at the thought of it. 'Only an egg in the Café de la Paix!' The trivial and the sublime. 'Ah, yes! It is terrible! Yes, m'sieur, you shall have an egg for the last meal in the Café de la Paix! Mon Dieu! An egg!' and he hurried away through the darkened room towards the kitchen, muttering words of distress and self-pity.

So Bridges and I had the last meal in the Café de la Paix, the proprietor locking up as we left.

Years later I visited this famous café-restaurant again. Paris was then being bombed, but yet the city was thronged with officers of the Allied Forces spending money. It seemed gay, prosperous, and almost undisturbed compared with the Paris of 3rd September, 1914.

I reminded the proprietor that I had had an egg—'the last meal in the Café de la Paix'—nearly four years before. He remembered and was genuinely delighted to see me, insisted on my sitting down then and there to a most sumptuous repast, waited on me himself, and absolutely declined any sort of payment.

We had both felt rather embarrassed at the wildly cheering crowds. We must have been almost the only English officers on the Grands Boulevards, for I saw no

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other English people, civil or military. But the crowd's enthusiasm for us had a certain pathos for there was no doubt that the news on all sides was bad. The British Army had been driven back in some confusion and with heavy loss, and the French Armies after several severe defeats were in full retreat through a countryside, in which many scores of those bowered French villages that had looked so green and tranquil in the August sunlight were in flames. In so many of those lanes we had passed half-bereft old dotards and tottering old dames, loaded with their little treasures and life's savings, staggering along in the heat. Many must have got knocked down and injured by limbers and loose horses galloping from a hail of shrapnel, fired perhaps from the captured French and British guns which the Germans were now using against us.

Watching amidst the crowd of refugees in the Place de l'Opera those who hurried along talking to themselves or who wept in excitement and self-pity, one was reminded again of the incidents of the last few days. We had swung through dusty country lanes at a trot or a gallop in the dawn, retreating with the smoke of burning villages on right and left, retreating past the cottages of those who had welcomed us as their saviours but ten days before; retreating at a walk or gallop—but *always* retreating—to safety, while we left old women and children behind in those burning villages without any means of escape, with not time even to listen to them as they implored us for advice and protection. I do not think that I am over-sensitive, but I had felt ashamed. Swords and lances were around me, but these and the guns and the blood hunters from Rothschild's stables, on which we rode, are all such a mockery when you fly and leave the unarmed, the aged and children, to the mercy of an enemy who pursues *you*. Propagandists and apologists

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can say what they like, but there is never anything glorious about a retreat—even a retreat from hell.

One incident in particular came back to me. One early morning at about 5 a.m., as we went at a fast trot through a high-hedged country lane, an upper window opened in a small isolated cottage that stood on the right of the road just where another narrow lane entered it. Out of the opened window there emerged the grizzled head of an ancient dame, her grey locks blown in the morning wind. There was an expression on her grim face and an accent in her voice which I shall not easily forget.

'Look! Look! *Mes Braves!* See, my Bold English! You make a mistake! The enemy is *behind* you! Ah! Are you not riding in the wrong direction?'

The bitter sarcasm in her voice as she watched us bolting from the haze of smoke and the rattle of artillery behind us, to leave her, evidently so old and so alone, in that isolated spot and amidst such dangers, was immeasurable. I felt we deserved her sarcasms, and wondered if I was the only one to notice her.

The night before Mons, riding through the huge manufacturing slum-suburbs of Wasmes, Frameries, and Paturages, had been pathetic. As we clattered through those dark cobbled streets of dreary working-class tenements every window had opened and men and women and children in their night clothes had rushed out into the streets to welcome us as their saviours. These poor folk, stunted industrial workers living on a pittance that English labourers would turn up their noses at, had rushed out to clasp our knees and to kiss our tired horses, to thrust hysterically upon us packets of chocolate and bottles of wine and any small luxury they possessed. That weary night had been a very penance of fatigue. Many of us, dozing, fell from our horses, the horses

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stumbling along riderless or themselves toppling over exhausted. A queer sort of triumphal ride it was. My hands had been filled with little charms, medallions of the Virgin Mary, and with grimy little bunches of flowers plucked from the shabby patches of ground behind the tenements. And then, twenty-four hours afterwards, we were retreating! Retreating past mounds of slag and ashes—past those dingy working-class homes with those packets of chocolate and other gifts still uneaten in our pockets; leaving those wretched people, their houses on fire, to what? We could only guess.

Bursting through one of the small villages near Noyon, with the enemy's machine-gun bullets singing amongst the telegraph wires and spitting against the walls behind us, we had halted for a moment while our Horse Artillery tried to hold up their advance. My horse, like myself, was suffering badly from thirst. An old dame fleeing from some neighbouring village with her apron full of ornaments and odd trifles she had saved, and with two small children hanging in pitiful terror at her skirts, realized our condition. Emptying her treasure into the pinafore of one of the children, she hurried to the well.

'Your horse, m'sieur, and you—you are so thirsty. You must drink!'

Thirsty as I was, I was impatient to be off; the Germans had the range and the village was becoming a hot corner.

'Never mind, madame! We must go. *Il faut partir tout de suite*. Go yourself! Go quickly or you and your two little ones will get hurt!'

'No, no, m'sieur. My grandchildren—the Germans won't surely hurt. Let me get you some water.'

Poor old soul; she was panting as she wound up the full bucket on the chain; staggering towards my horse

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she offered him the water. The greedy animal, nearly knocking her over, thrust his great head eagerly into the bucket, drenching her.

'There!' she nodded triumphantly.

In a moment we were off. I left the old dame dazed and trembling in the street, gun-carriages and limbers racing through at break-neck speed; some of the houses already on fire. In all that smoke and confusion and reckless, almost panic-stricken driving, did she get knocked down—her children run over or killed by bullets and shrapnel—or burnt? I hardly liked to think of it; but if so she risked her own life and perhaps her grandchildren's to fetch water for my horse. There were times when in the midst of these scenes I think many of us would have preferred to stay and perish with the rest. Do those who, like this old woman, risk their lives out of mercy for animals avoid many painful rebirths in the cycles of existence? One feels now that it was in these heroic old peasant women that there lived the true *Marianne*—the Soul of France.

Just beyond another village I had seen several women, young and old, lying dead by the side of the road with shrapnel wounds in their temples, the road round them littered with the over-ornamented little clocks and trinkets of which the French peasantry are so fond, and all about were other small household treasures they had been carrying in their arms. I wondered as I waited for Bridges in the Place de l'Opéra in that changed Paris, if the French Government would ever know just how many of the old and the young were being killed and injured upon those panic-stricken country roads.

Bridges—he had been an attaché at the Hague just before the War—had left me ruminating thus while he went to find some of his official and diplomatic friends in Paris. He came back looking grave. There was bad

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news from Russia and from Turkey; Italy was still wobbling, and the French Government, disappointed and convinced that our General Sir John French was a broken reed, and anxious to save their beloved Paris from bombardment and siege at almost any cost, were said to be about to open up a parley with Germany. On our drive back I remember we talked of certain pre-War happenings in England, of King George's indignation and disgust on hearing of the mutiny at the Curragh; of the suffragette conspiracy to burn churches, of the division of opinion concerning Sir John French's appointment; and of that real disaster of the first days of the War, General Grierson's untimely death.

Arrived back at Gournay we were not pleased to hear a rumour that we were to leave early the next morning. Apparently we were to take part in a great attack on the German Army, who were now almost stationary. Also an order had come that we were to 'travel light', to leave all our transport, including even our water-carts and the Medical-cart, behind. I secretly made up my mind that, so far as I was concerned, I would disobey such a ridiculous order. What on earth use would I, a doctor, be without my cart containing the reserves of drugs and dressings? As if a doctor like the prophets of old could cure his patients by merely looking at them or touching them with healing hands! I remembered in the South African War an identical order coming round. Being very young then I had taken it literally, throwing away on the veldt, as we were told to do, even the wallets from my saddle which contained a tin of disinfectant for the foul water. In consequence, like most of the others, I had contracted typhoid. As it turned out it was lucky I was so insubordinate, for most of the other units at Gournay obeyed this order, so during the battles of the Marne and the Aisne afterwards, the store for dressings in my medical-cart

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formed the only reserve available for the whole Brigade.

The threat of an early start turned out to be a false alarm. Actually we had another twenty-four hours at Gournay—time to bathe in the River Marne that flowed past the meadow in which we were bivouacked. A boat-load of quite naked officers splashing and shouting made a good Sunday afternoon's entertainment for the worthy *bourgeoisie* of the neighbourhood.

Next morning we really were off again, De Lisle in his cheerful way having assured us that 'the real fighting was now about to begin!' Did he think we were all more bloodthirsty than we were, or was it a kind of nervousness or grim humour? Whichever it was, I did not find it particularly exhilarating, and I fired off a postcard home in case I should not have another chance.

CHAPTER VIII

PÉCY

Leaving Gournay on September 5th, we rode south-east towards Rozoy, and the next day clashed with German cavalry at Pécy. But now the offensive was ours. Again that stinging, venomous buzz of shrapnel which spits down at us through the trees. Men fall unconscious from their horses with holes drilled in their skulls by those spinning, bruising bullets; a cloth service-cap feels horribly inadequate; steel helmets are yet unborn.

My horse gets excited because a shrapnel bullet spins itself on his nose after having glanced off the bough of a tree. As he plunges wildly about in the squadron, painfully jerking my damaged shoulder, I shout reassuringly at him. Someone thinks I am rallying the jumble of excited horsemen around me. In the midst of a wild scramble, in which we are trying to advance through a grove of trees to put the 'wind up' the German gunners who are making things hot for us, my cap and Alymer's are knocked off by shrapnel bullets. We both have to dismount and go rummaging in the hedge for them.

It seemed so absurd to be doing this in the middle of an action that we both laughed—though I felt like anything but laughing.

We didn't clear the German gunners out; they began to clear us out, but never got us further back than the outskirts of the village. I spent the morning dismounting

lightly wounded man I had ordered to go with him to look after the officers.

Alas! On the long rough journey in the sun the mattresses, supported on their outer sides by the rails of the haycart, sagged gradually into the centre. The peasant was a complete oaf and apparently allowed the wounded officers, almost completely helpless as they were and without any protection from the sun on the long hot trek to Paris, to roll down the one upon the other. When they reached Paris the one most underneath was dead. The survivors whom I met again later on in the War did not blame me. They assured me that the officer who had died would have died anyway. Certainly all of them had nasty wounds. One of them, Straker Smith, a fine horseman, recovered sufficiently to win a big race soon afterwards. At the moment of bundling them off, almost anything seemed better than leaving them to be either burnt or trodden on or left for the advancing Germans to dispose of.

We had gone into action at about 7 a.m. After about four hours of excitement the enemy had apparently thought better of it and begun slowly to retire. The 9th as well as the 4th had suffered pretty severely. In the fields round the village there were men lying dead in twos and threes alongside limbers overturned in the hedges and ditches, or out in the open; the flies were already settling on them.

Having got most of the wounded away in carts, I wandered into the garden of the château. It was the second week of September, and the fruit was in perfection. I had never seen such profusion, and several of our men were already there filling their empty stomachs with peaches, nectarines, pears, apricots and the most delicious apples and bush-fruit of every variety. We had been on the march since 5 a.m., and I lay down on the

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cool tiled floor of a private chapel belonging to the château. Within an hour we were off again with the Grand Morin ten miles ahead.

We bivouacked that night in a bare field south of Chevru. At dawn on the 6th we were near Choisy, and at about 8 a.m. again in collision with the enemy's cavalry, the 9th Lancers who had lost pretty heavily the day before distinguishing themselves again.

In a field just below, near Moncel, I saw something moving. Walking up to it I recognized the wounded man. Colonel David Campbell, commanding the 9th Lancers, lay sprawled out in a field of clover. Forty yards from his feet and downhill was a small copse, a hundred and fifty yards from his shoulder and uphill a narrow belt of woodland. He had, if I remember rightly, a revolver wound in his leg, a lance wound in his shoulder, and a sword wound in his arm. This field had been the scene of a fine charge. A half-squadron of the 9th Lancers had just charged through a squadron and a half of German cavalry, and the deep clover of the field concealed many wounded men and horses of both regiments.

'I am sorry to find you like this, sir,' I said, kneeling down to dress his wounds.

'Not at all, my boy! Not at all! I've just had the best quarter of an hour I've ever had in my life!'

I bandaged 'David' up, and within a few weeks he was back again leading his Regiment. This caused no surprise amongst those who knew him. 'David', said one of his subalterns to me afterwards, 'will someday go down and chase Satan out of hell!'

And the others in that charge! Well, they weren't all as cool as 'David'.

One I remember, a big lout of a trooper, a boy recruit obviously fresh from the farm, had also taken part in the

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charge and come under some heavy bursts of shrapnel. Unhorsed in the charge, or just afterwards, he lay upon the ground, calling out lustily.

'Where are you hurt?' I asked.

'Oh, here, sir!' vaguely indicating his back.

I wasted no time, ripping up his tunic and shirt with scissors and jack-knife, for the Germans were now putting shrapnel over the field. But I could find no injury.

'I can't see any wound. Where does it hurt most? Be quick—tell me!'

The writhing giant now indicated his stomach and thighs. Again the scissors and jack-knife sent the remnants of Trooper Blank's clothing flying in all directions.

'Where? Where?' I shouted, for the shrapnel was getting noisy and unpleasant.

'Oh, I don't know, sir, I'm sure,' moaned Trooper Blank, breaking into an hysterical burst of tears.

'You idiot!' I said, furious at such waste of time. 'Get up quickly and run under cover!'

Trooper Blank, dazed by his fall and his fright and his baptism of fire, rose to his feet and went off at top speed, not towards the wood, but straight towards the Germans. He was a very large young man and clumsily made and, except for his boots and his puttees trailing behind him, he ran through that clover field almost as naked as he was born, the bright sunshine shining full on him as he ran. The German cavalry continued their retirement, but at the speed he went off he must have overtaken them.

And still there were others lying in that field, many of them Germans badly wounded. To discourage the young German recruit, fresh from his Pomeranian farm, from surrendering too readily to the English, he had been filled up with usual war propaganda that the 'enemy'—

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the English—always treated their prisoners very brutally; that we would even put out their eyes! Consequently even those Germans that lay in the deep clover, badly wounded or with both their legs broken, decided to ensure their own quick death rather than torturing blindness, by shooting, as they lay concealed in the herbage, as many more Englishmen as they could. One wounded German, crawling up to a wounded horse that lay beside him, steadied his rifle on the belly of the horse and shot an officer of the 9th Lancers dead, and then a sergeant-major (Durrant) in the back, before he himself was finally dispatched. Naturally, in this vicious circle, we then began to shoot any of the wounded who made the slightest movement. It is jumpy work looking after enemy wounded in deep grass when the propaganda of war has incited both sides neither to expect mercy nor to give it.

One of the Lancers had been terribly wounded in this way after the charge. A wounded German had fired at him at such close quarters that the poor fellow's stomach had been almost completely blown away. And yet, poor devil, he was not even unconscious.

Because of the bursts of shrapnel over the field and the loose horses, we carried him, not without causing him infinite pain, into the edge of the wood at the top of the field, and there I tried to cover up the hideous blackened wound with gauze, and gave him some water. I thought he would never stop drinking. Technically it was wrong to give him anything to drink, but he so plainly could not live that it would have been unreasonable to resist his entreaties. Of course, I gave him big doses of morphia, but I had begun to think that the drug had lost its power. Poor chap—for hours he refused to die! I had much to do, but went back to him several times; he was so completely helpless, and I had seen two large rough-

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looking dogs roaming about in the wood. At last I had to leave him, tying a piece of white bandage to a tree so that some advancing ambulance might find him.

I picked up what was left of the bandages and gauze and stuffed them into my pockets. He had not long to live, so I covered his face with some gauze to keep the wood-flies from worrying and folded his hands over what was left of his bloodstained tunic. Out of pain now—and scarcely conscious—he saw I was going. ‘Good-bye, B,’ I said, ‘you will soon be asleep. You will never have to do another charge!’

It was beginning to grow dark as I got up to go, and then I hardly could. I had had to move him a good deal in trying to dress the huge, gaping wound, and though I must have caused him the most intense pain he had been so patient, scarcely uttering a sound. There was something about that still form, with the white mask of gauze over its head, lying there so helpless alone in the darkening woodland, that seemed to call me back.

I do not know what made me do it—I had never done such a thing before—but I went back and kneeling down beside him, unable to say anything, I pressed his hand. I think he understood.

¹ This man's name was, I believe, Bayer.

CHAPTER IX

THE PETIT MORIN

From Moncel across the Grand Morin near Jouy and on through Rebais to Le Tretoire we kept bumping into the rearguard of the retreating Germans, their Horse Artillery putting up a barrier to our pursuit. Near Le Tretoire and La Forge, the Petit Morin is but a brook about twelve to fifteen feet wide. Descending its wooden banks and attempting to seize a bridge, we were checked by smart fire from machine-guns and rifles. Mounted and in full view of the German riflemen and machine-gunners on the opposite bank, we got a hot time. Orders or no orders, I had half a mind to dismount as the bullets flicked and skipped about amongst us. My horse was a big upstanding animal, and one felt unnecessarily conspicuous.

Fortunately the range across a valley and stream is deceptive, and there were but few casualties. The sergeant-major of the 4th, halted immediately beside me, was not enjoying this Aunt Sally business either. Suddenly he said: 'You're hit, sir!' Sure enough, running from just under the centre of my tunic, was a tiny stream of blood. I had felt nothing, that rather added to my alarm.

I tore open my tunic, the warm blood pouring out between my knuckles; but though the flesh of my stomach was smeared with blood, I had no pain. Suddenly the bleeding ceased from my stomach and was now oozing

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out from under my thigh. The next moment we were galloping down the steep slope towards the stream, the whole air shrill with the whine and scream of bullets flying overhead or striking the track beneath our feet. Both I and the sergeant-major had failed to notice that a bullet had passed clean through the base of his horse's ear, which at that moment was within a few inches of my body. The severed artery in his horse's ear had been pumping a fine jet of blood on to my tunic and saddle. What the sergeant-major did see—or rather hear, but I never noticed—was that the bullet continuing its course rapped against the buckle of my Sam Browne belt just where he noticed the blood.

Jones and his troop eventually rushed the bridge very gallantly. We got a good many wounded, including Gordon Monro, hit in the knee, and a gallant and mysterious 'volunteer' S., who had insisted on joining the 4th Dragoon Guards at the last minute as Major Bridges's 'servant'. I supposed him to have been some old friend, possibly an ex-officer, who had lost his commission in some scrape just before the War. The 'volunteer', who wore an officer's uniform but without any badge of rank, got badly wounded in the leg at Mons, but refused to consider himself wounded. So scared was he that I should send him down to the base as 'wounded', that he would scarcely let me dress the ugly septic wound in his leg. He was one of many in those early days who would not admit that they were wounded lest they should have to go home. This very brave man, riding anything from twenty to forty miles a day with the wound in his leg still a deep gaping ulcer, was shot in the head on the Aisne and died almost immediately. Bridges seemed to feel his death keenly.

The bridge over the Petit Morin, charged and captured by Jones with only about a dozen men, was a vital

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loss for the Germans. Soon, the enemy in full retreat, we were all pouring excitedly across and through the woods and vineyards on the far side.

In these woods my horse nearly stepped on a wounded German officer. Karl von Waldo was, he told me, his name. I dressed the wound in his leg, fastened his sword as a war trophy on to my saddle, tied a piece of bandage on the tree above him to mark his position for our ambulance wagons, and having made him fairly comfortable was on the point of riding on when I noticed a line of pink tape showing by his collar.

'*Was ist das?*' I asked. He looked uncomfortable; I decided to search him.

The pink tape I found ended in a flat chamois leather bag beneath his vest; it was absolutely full of notes of high value in French and Belgian money. In those days a thousand franc note was worth forty pounds, and there must have been scores of these notes. I noticed several had bloodstained thumb marks on their corners, and many had been stamped and endorsed by Belgian banks.

I took the bag away from him, explained why I was doing so, and gave him a receipt for the total sum. I also remembered to take from him—we were instructed to do this—his compass, watch, pocket-knife, field-glasses, and everything except his food and his water bottle. I was just going to mount again with my booty when Tom Bridges appeared.

'What are you doing?' he asked.

'Why, this fellow, Major, is absolutely full of money. Either it's loot or he is a requisitioning officer.'

'Yes, but *you* must not take it from him.'

'Why not? I have just given him a receipt for the money in case it is actually his own; and I will get a receipt myself for the amount from the Provost Marshal of the Division or somebody.'

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'No, no, I shouldn't touch it.'

Bridges was senior to me, and having been an attaché in our Diplomatic Service presumably knew as much or more about the Geneva Convention as I; so Karl von Waldo kept his money. His wound was not dangerous; he may still be alive. I should be much interested to know what happened to him and his notes.

Two years afterwards, Bridges, who had become a Major-General while I was but a Major, came up to me on the leave-boat at Folkestone. I remember he asked why I was not wearing the Croix de Guerre or some other French decoration for which I had apparently been recommended by General De Lisle, but which I had never received. Then I reminded him of Karl von Waldo and his money.

'You were right!' he said. 'I don't know now why I stopped you. It would have been better to have taken all the money away. Lying behind our lines like that with all that money in his pocket and not seriously wounded he may have bribed spies. He was certainly a possible danger.'

Close to the Petit Morin and La Tretoire we had witnessed a village comedy not without significance. On our arrival in a small hamlet near La Forge we had been met by a skinny old dame full of reproaches against the 'sale Boche', who had, she declared, not only looted the whole village but raped her without ceremony, in spite of her advanced age. This rather repulsive-looking old woman I thought did not really appear too pleased at our arrival hot on the heels of the departing Germans. We halted for an hour or two nearby, and some of the inhabitants of the village, who had apparently fled from it during the retirement of the Germans through the village, began to return. Then I heard recriminations begin concerning the supposed rape and other events which the

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old dame alleged had just taken place. Her disagreeable appearance and the fact that the Germans had been in hasty retreat in passing through the village, which they had only occupied for a few hours and under our fire, made me think her story unlikely. In fact I had refused as a doctor, to examine her—as a liaison officer had suggested—to confirm her story or otherwise, for propaganda purposes. The other inhabitants returning to the village were beginning to be loud in their complaints. Various pieces of lace and odd valuables unlikely to interest German troops in hasty retreat, had been taken from under their mattresses and other hiding places. Soon I overheard them making definite accusations against the old dame. Certain of their treasures, including some she had been known to covet or had in the past laid disputed claim to, had, they said, just been discovered under her mattress.

'You! Raped by the Germans indeed! Rubbish!' shouted several excited French peasants. 'We all know why people like *you* stay behind when the Germans come! You stayed just to do a little quiet raping of your own. No wonder one of my hens is missing, the best layer that I've ever had!'

'Yes, and my two real silver spoons from my *armoire*!' shouted another.

We left her surrounded by an indignant crowd.

We had already, I am afraid, done a little looting ourselves. In one château we had occupied in the territory we captured from the Germans during the last few days, one of us, whose valise had been lost in the panic at Le Plessis, had taken a fancy to an excellent suitcase. On our departure the next morning it had been the last thing to be slung up on to the wagon containing officers' kit. Unfortunately, at the very gates, just as we left the château, we encountered a smart-looking French officer,

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who, we found, was the owner; he was returning to see just how much damage the Germans had done to his property. But the first thing he noticed was his own suitcase on top of one of our wagons! He indignantly demanded it should be taken off. Unfortunately, it turned out to be half full of silk ties and other clothing which the pirate had not taken the trouble to empty out. This was a most unfortunate incident. We felt that the Frenchman would assume that any damage or loss which he discovered afterwards in his château would now be attributed quite as much to us as to the Germans.

The Germans were now in full retreat and we hot upon their tracks; the dead bodies of horses, lame or for some reason unable to keep up with them, which they had shot to prevent their falling into our hands, lay still warm by the roadsides. The roads were strewn with cloaks and gear that had fallen from their hurriedly packed transport. As we swung round at a gallop through the narrow twisting lanes the very air smelt of them. If we could only keep them on the run!

Were they leaving spies—a trail of spies—behind them as well as shattered bridges and very suspiciously ‘sick’ horses? Gal de Ledevéz, our interpreter, and I, would do a little spy hunting whenever we halted. Once we found three young French peasants hidden in a rick in rather suspicious circumstances; they explained it by saying they were frightened. Another was found with a carload of loot, mostly silver plate; he turned out to be a Russian chauffeur and was, I heard, immediately shot by the French military authorities. Another French officer found a man twisting the hands of a church tower clock as signs to the German artillery, or to some other spy to indicate our position.

Often the copses and woods were full of the strands of

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fine blue wire the Germans used for their pocket telephones; and there were said to be 'French peasants' who drove a red cow in front of a white one, or *vice versa* in order to give the Germans the position of our guns.

Possibly, some of these 'French peasants' were, as it was said, persons of German extraction who had settled in France just before the War, or who had special reasons to wish the Germans to advance.

Clearly, when the Germans advanced, numbers of the more prosperous and the more timid people would hastily and prematurely desert their property, leaving behind in their village only the old and the feeble, the spies and the thieves. The latter naturally profited by the situation and all losses were blamed on the Germans. The same thing happened during our Black and Tan Campaign in Ireland. Anyone who desired to commit robbery, murder, or any other crime, or to pay off some old score by ham-stringing his neighbour's cattle or burning his house (and village hatreds can be as venomous and as bitter as Corsican feuds), had a good chance of doing so with impunity. Then he could accuse either the Sinn Feiners or the Black and Tans of the private crimes he had himself committed; even pinning a label on to the coat of his dead enemy to explain 'shot by Sinn Fein as a traitor' or 'executed as a rebel by the Black and Tan'. War is a godsend to the thief, the rogue, and the blackguard.

Again, between Basseville and Nogent, Chezy and Le Theolet, Rozet on the Ourcq, Oulchy le Château and Grand Rozoy, we were in touch with the enemy.

From Grand Rozoy through Arcy St. Restitut to Cerceuil we ran into continuous thunderstorms and drenching showers. Then, near Braisne, in a heavy downpour we were once more in collision with the enemy, who re-

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tired, leaving behind a number of their wounded. Many of them had terrible wounds on the face, eyes damaged, mouth or nose all shot away. Unable to speak, they were only just able to sit up on the sides of the road, holding their shattered faces or feebly wringing their hands and making signs to draw the attention of our troops who pressed on past them in the mud and rain.

I had soon used up most of my available supplies of dressings, and in the meantime had again, for about the hundredth time, lost touch with the Brigade. Hunting for them, I noticed an English officer lying dead on the hillside, just above a narrowish road leading down into Braisne. A yard or two from him lay a heavy sporting rifle, a .450 or .577, capable of making a terribly ugly wound; the kind of rifle I had used in India on the banks of the Jumna for shooting crocodile. I dismounted and examined the body. From letters and papers in his pocket it was apparently the body of Bertram Stuart, a noted British Intelligence Officer (as we politely call them when they are spying on our own side). How he came to be lying there and with that sporting rifle alongside of him I never heard. A year or two before the War, Stuart's activities had been a seven-days' wonder. The Germans had arrested him and another English officer for spying in Germany, and they had both been condemned to two years' imprisonment in a fortress. There had been a great rumpus about it in the English papers. Rather unreasonably, it was treated as merely another German provocation to England.

Anyway, here, apparently, was Bertram Stuart—and dead—with his pockets full of papers and personal possessions by which he could be identified. Now a business-like spy is supposed to have no papers on him at all, except false papers, and he is better even without those. Were these false papers? It was queer. The Germans

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were then in full retreat, and that is not usually the occasion on which a spy runs very much risk of death or capture.

But if he had not been shot by the Germans, then by whom? Why had they left these evidently important papers in his pockets? And that rifle! I cannot quite remember now the nature of his wound. I think he had been shot in the breast just above the heart. His body was soaked with rain, quite cold and stiff. In haste I collected everything personal upon his body and tied the lot in a handkerchief and decided I would hand it to one of the Staff of the Cavalry Division. As I packed the papers and letters together, I discovered amongst them a list; and unless it was a fake, purposely intended to blind the Germans, it was a document of the most vital importance to England, for it was nothing less than a long list of English spies operating in Germany and with the German Second Echelon. What a find for the Germans! Nearby in the road was an abandoned motor car and some deadly-looking explosive ammunition for the sporting rifle—a bad breach of the Geneva Convention! Did that explain? Or was the whole thing an elaborate ruse?

The main road to Courcelles was now thronged with troops and transport, the Army pressing on in pursuit of the Germans. General Allenby with the Staff of the Cavalry Division were grouped on the right-hand side of the road watching the passing troops. Going up to them I gave the papers and other things I had found to one of his Staff—Colonel 'Sally' Home, I think it was—and told him what I had seen.

It had been raining off and on all day; there was now a perfect downpour. More and more wounded, mostly Germans, lay in the ditches and sat on the banks all along the roadside, some in such shocking condition I felt

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obliged to stop and do something for some of them; meanwhile, amidst the press of troops my orderly and groom with our three horses and my raincoat disappeared. Luckily, trudging along in the mud and darkness, I was overtaken by Sadleir Jackson of the 9th Lancers in a car; passing Courcelles and Dhuizel we soon reached Longueval together, wet through, but in time to get some food before turning in for a few hours sleep.

CHAPTER X

LONGUEVAL-ON-THE-AISNE

The Battle of the Five Rivers was over. In nine days we had regained a strip of France about fifty miles wide, the Cavalry having covered many times that distance. Behind us lay the Grand Morin, the Petit Morin, the Marne, the Ourcq and the Vesle. Strategists now announce that this engagement was *the* decisive battle of the War. We certainly didn't realize its importance at the time—it seemed but a succession of skirmishes—and we should have simply laughed at any suggestion that the disorganization and discomfiture of the retiring Germans was anything like as great as our own after Mons and Le Cateau.

Yet that pursuit had been thrilling. Through the intermittent thunderstorms and heat and glare of those early September days we had pressed on; past Coulommiers and Château Thierry with their broken bridges, then across the Marne between Chezy and Azy, toiling up the steep riversides in the broiling heat, our mouths full of the small purple grapes we snatched from the vineyards. Every hour a fesh situation had developed: sharp cavalry actions, bursts of shrapnel, sudden pursuits that took us down winding, steep, and rocky lanes, past the stone galleries of the Cave Dwellers whose bowmen and slingers had repulsed the Gauls two thousand years ago. So past Oulchy and Braisne and Courcelles in driving rain to Longueval-on-the-Aisne.

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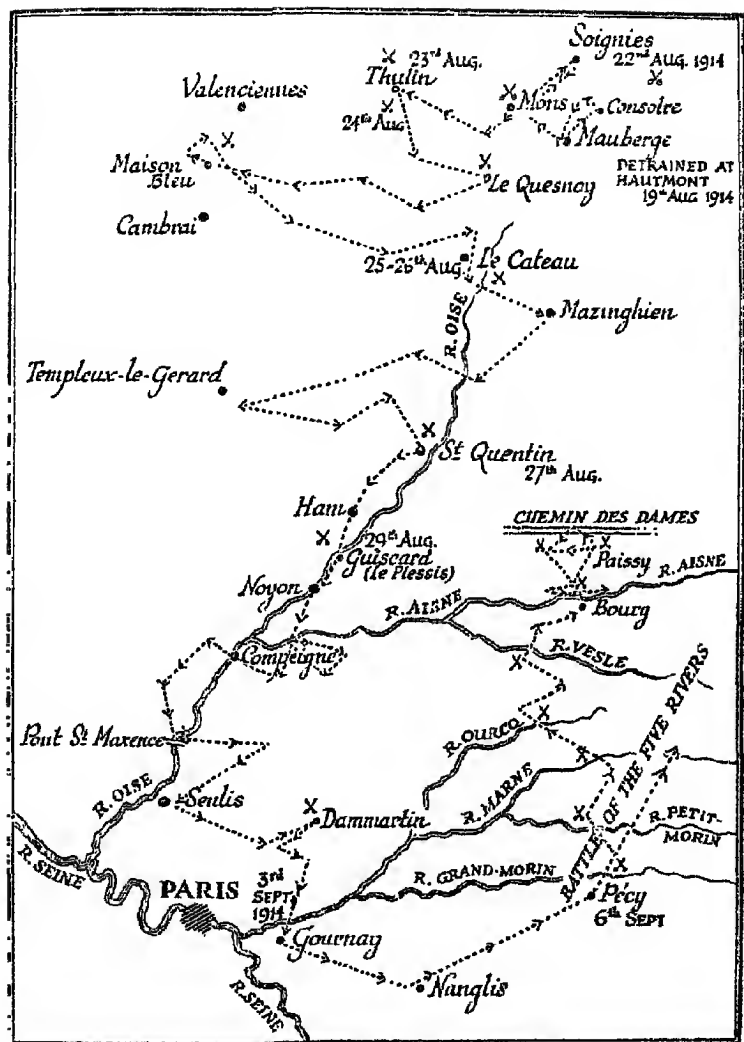
At Longueval we billeted in a house that had been occupied by a pious spinster of a certain age; the frequent visits to her of the village Curé had, we were told, caused scandal. In a bin outside the spinster's villa we found many dozens of empty bottles, and presently our mess servant discovered in a chimney two dozen more, full! That Curé was no fool. It was a fine vintage.

It was later on in this village that the 9th Lancers, quartered a little lower down the street, received their badly needed first substantial reinforcement of about ninety men and horses. They arrived fresh and keen with much news of what was going on; of the joy our successes on the Petit Morin and the Marne had caused in England after a month of gloom and nerve-wracking uncertainty.

The reinforcement was paraded in a square yard partly paved with stone and surrounded with houses and high walls. The men dismounted and standing at their horses' heads were answering their names and being told off for various duties. Probably, not one of them had ever in his life fired a shot to kill.

I was standing just the other side of one of the walls, with a letter in my hand, about to drop it into the Brigade post-bag, when down the wind from the side of the village which looked towards the heights on the further side of the Aisne came a low moaning sound, ominous to anyone familiar with the sound of long-distance artillery fire. The moan narrowed to a whining scream. There was a flash, a terrific metallic detonation, the walls of the building shook, and the air was full of dust.

Fragments of stone, manure, pieces of clothing and hair came falling all about me as I ran through an archway into the yard and beheld one of the most heartrending sights I have ever seen, even in war. The detachment of the 9th Lancers had almost completely disappeared.



Sketch map showing the movements of part of the Second Cavalry Brigade during the retreat from Mons and the advance towards the Aisne.

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In the centre of the yard where I had seen them but a moment before, there was now a mound four or five feet high of dead men and horses, all too obviously dead, yet still they were moving, men and horses twitching and sliding over one another with slow writhing movements, the men's faces purple, crimson or ash-grey. For a moment, rooted to the ground, I stared at this heap—a moving mound of death.

Then, from all sides of the yard, a chorus of screams, shouts and groans. Around this central heap of dead men the wounded lay on all sides. Some had been blown to the other end of the yard, their backs broken. One sat up dazed and whimpering, his back against a wall, holding part of his intestine in his hand. Those nearest to the heap, with terrible stomach wounds, or with legs and arms torn away, were only moaning and writhing; it was those further off, comparatively speaking the least damaged yet terribly injured, who shouted and screamed in agony. For a moment or two, alone in that desolate scene, I ran hither and thither, hardly knowing what to do or where to begin. I began to shout to my groom out side to go for assistance, to my corporal to fetch bags of dressings and chloroform. Presently officers and men of both regiments came racing breathlessly into the yard, some without their caps, saying: 'My God! My God! What has happened? Can we help?'

Help! It was evidently no good beginning with the inner ring of mangled victims, they would die anyway; I must begin in the outer ring; but even there much of it seemed useless and hopeless.

I spread strips of gauze over the gaping rents in the stomachs of the men who had been partially disembowelled. One terribly wounded—in the outer ring—lay with both legs partly torn away at the knee, one arm broken and other wounds; he was still conscious.

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'Oh! My God! Shoot me! Shoot me!' he moaned. Quick! I injected some morphia into his breast. It had no effect. Someone who had rushed into the yard was standing, breathless, horror-stricken, beside me. The tortured man recognized him—his brother!

'Shoot me, Tom! Oh! Shoot me! For the love of God! Shoot me, will you! WILL YOU!' he began to scream pitcously.

Irresolutely, the man appealed to, fumbled with his revolver and looked at me rather wildly. He was trembling, and his face was very white. Then, suddenly dropping his revolver, he covered his face with his hands and staggered away.

I hastily soaked with chloroform a piece of clothing that had been literally blown from one of the other wounded, and doubling it, I laid it over the mouth of the agonized man beside whom I was kneeling.

Officers and men were now bringing in stretchers, doors and hurdles, lifting up those I had temporarily dressed and carrying them away into the neighbouring houses. I worked on, losing all count of time.

I was dulling pain with chloroform; morphia seemed quite useless. My knees were soiled with manure from the yard; the spurting arteries that I had tried to check had drenched the front of my tunic and accoutrements and sprinkled my face, where the blood dried. My arms to the elbows were caked.

By some ill chance the doctor of the 9th Lancers—they had now one of their own again—had gone that morning to the Headquarters of the Division, but Beale Brown, Rex Benson, Reynolds, Blackwood, Grenfell, Aylmer, Romer-Williams, Geoffrey Phipps Hornby, and many other officers and men of the 9th and 4th Dragoon Guards came and did all they possibly could, working even as stretcher-bearers. My own corporal, a brave

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man, cool and patient, one of the very best in the 4th, toiled without ceasing.

It had been about nine or ten o'clock in the morning when the shell had burst, and it must have been after noon when I had got the last wounded man into the ambulance wagons. The dead had been carried away and a party detailed to dig their graves. Too tired to eat or take off my bloodstained uniform, I lay down in my billet.

Adversity is generally delivered of twins, if not of triplets, and we were not to have much rest that day. About four o'clock other shells began falling in the fields near and in the village. One of them fell in a narrow paved street, embedding itself in the stone gutter with an earth-shaking thud, and then failed to explode. There had been many 'duds' in the South African War, but this was the first I had seen in France. That afternoon was actually our first experience of really long-range German gunfire.

Having had some tea and recovered a little from the morning's strain, I walked down the street to have another look at the dud. It was—for those days—a big shell, eight inches or so across at the base. A good foot of its length was buried between the granite cobbles close to a high wall.

I did not linger; I had seen duds before, and also have a superstition against lingering too long over things which are temporarily innocuous, but intended to be quite otherwise. I left the dud still surrounded by a crowd of the 9th; it had fallen just outside the house which was being used as a mess for the non-commissioned officers of the Regiment. There must have been six or seven sergeants—one, a very tall man—and perhaps thirty or forty men there when I left. They were very pleased that this one was a dud. They were laugh-

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ing and chaffing one another now; for the thud of its descent, after that morning's grim disaster, had caused many of them to bolt into safety.

They did not apparently hear another whining moaning noise coming down the wind. I did, though I was then about two hundred yards up the winding village street. A terrific double report shook the whole village. . . . For a moment I stood wondering where this last one had gone. Then breathless figures came dashing up the street towards me.

'Come quickly, sir! It's another one! It's burst and killed all the sergeants!'

Running back with them, the morning's wail of agonized cries and shouts broke again on my ears. Though there was this time no moving mound of dead men, the sight was almost a repetition of what I had seen as I had dashed into the courtyard about six hours earlier. Evidently the unexpected, as usual, had happened. The second shell had landed on top of or alongside the first, and both had exploded amongst the group of men in that narrow paved street and between those high walls.

Once more I was kneeling down beside men almost hopelessly injured. In some ways things were worse than in the morning, for the street, unlike the courtyard, was less than twenty feet wide, and in such a confined space the wounded had been hurled against the walls. Worst of all, the half-buried shell in exploding had splintered dozens of the granite cobble-stones, and fragments of stone as well as splinters of steel were embedded deep in the flesh of many of the wounded.

The first man I tried to do something for had had the lower part of his stomach partly torn away and the right leg completely separated at the knee, the great pink and white end of the thigh bone stripped of its flesh resting on the mud, manure, and broken stones in the street. He

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was unconscious from shock. Presently they were imploring me to go to one big man whose ear-splitting screams were racking the nerves of those less seriously wounded, whose lives we were trying to save.

'Can't you stop him, Doctor?'

'Stop that man who's raving and shrieking! Put him out of his agony!'

'Shoot him, or for God's sake give him morphia or something!'

I knelt beside him. I hope I shall not see such a sight again. The greater part of his huge body, partly stripped of clothing by the explosion, was plastered with fragments of granite varying in size from a pea to an egg. Some I could pick out; others were too deeply embedded, some almost completely buried in the body like currants in a cake. But that was not the worst. The two shells must have burst right at the man's feet. There had evidently been delayed ignition in one or both, for the nitrous fumes of gelignite, or whatever it was that the shells were charged with, had acted on this poor wretch like boiling acids. The flesh had been peeled up from his legs almost to the knees, and the bare pinkish bones stripped of their covering reminding me in a horrible instant of the museum skeletons from which when a student at Guy's I had learnt my anatomy. Yet in spite of these terrible injuries the man was anything but unconscious. I have never heard such yells and screams. I could not hear a word I was saying nor answer intelligently in such a din any of the many questions that were being put to me about the other wounded. Again I drenched with chloroform a piece of lint, and laying it over his mouth got one of the less severely wounded lying beside to hold it there, while I covered up his legs and the worst of his other wounds with dressings.

Everything had to be done perfunctorily; indeed it

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was not justifiable to spend much time over any single case when so many called for help. Yet I remember that in spite of the drenching dose of chloroform it was a long time before that six-foot-three of agonized humanity stopped screaming. Perhaps it would have been more merciful to have shot the worst and obviously fatal cases at once, as some of the wounded and some of the spectators urged me to do. 'Do unto others!'—I know that I myself in such a case would have begged to be put out of my misery. I suppose I was weak, but I felt the moral effect of such an action on all the other seriously wounded men lying around would be appalling. Soon Captain Maughan, Medical Officer with the 18th Hussars, came to help, and ambulances began to arrive, either from Villers or Veil D'Arcy.

At last the gruesome work was finished. I walked up the street to my billet, too tired now to go on further to the mess and wait for supper. I fell asleep that night, not to dream of the War—I never did that but once—but with a feeling of hopelessness on my mind, a sense of the futility of life. To those of us who spent their lives first in urging their fellows to keep fit, and then in binding up their shattered bodies in war, this sense of futility comes inevitably.

Before I fell asleep I read a letter from home that had come for me that afternoon. It was from a wealthy woman, a peeress, one who had relations in influential positions. It was a very kind, cheery, patriotic sort of letter, full of accounts of how everyone in England was loyally helping, 'even the Boy Scouts are helping to relieve the messengers in the War Office—splendid little chaps—some only about twelve years old are guarding the telegraph wires in Sussex, and many will soon be big enough to go to the training camps. . . .'

I thought of these Boy Scouts, children almost. Yes—

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if the War went on they would sooner or later be coming out to fight. And they would certainly make fine soldiers. Only . . . if this slaughter had such an effect on myself, a doctor used to the sight of blood and pain, what effects would it have on those youngsters? They would probably either get callous or neurasthenic or just demoralized. And a younger generation made callous. . . . What sort of after-War world would we have then? It was not likely to be very honest or hopeful or peaceful! Abstention from violence, hatred, racial pride, and suspicion of foreigners must be learnt in our *youth*—or never! So we should certainly get another War-to-end-War! Well, I hoped I would be no longer a soldier when that came.

General Baden-Powell's idea of training and drilling and exhorting the Boy Scouts of England to grow up into 'manly little chaps' was so plausible, so patently sound on the face of it, that one was almost forced to approve of it. The English newspapers already hinted that these children were our future soldiers. I thought of what I had seen that afternoon! The young Scouts were to be clean and active in body and in mind; they must abstain from sloth and cigarette smoking and sensuality and misbehaviour in order that they might grow up to be, amongst other things, more capable of competing with their fellows, better able to kill rapidly, *anyone*—Frenchman, Russian, German, Hindu or Egyptian—with whom England would presently be at war. Would it not be rather an ignoble end to such noble efforts? The Chief Scout was not a doctor, artist, or philanthropist, but a distinguished General! So every little Boy Scout must instinctively be wishing to emulate the warlike achievements of that much bemedalled war hero—their Military Chieftain. But surely that kind of hero-worship already comes only too naturally to the boyish mind. They would wish to be great *soldiers*. Was not then their

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manliness and hardihood and self-control, their abstinence from drink and sensuality, but as the sharpening of spears and the grinding of swords? To what lasting world benefit was this strain and stress and self-denial if but to end in more intense commercial rivalry and greedy nationalism—if but to culminate in six-foot-three of battered humanity, screaming out those ear-splitting obscenities in that blood bespattered street that the moon was now looking down into, only two hundred yards from where I lay? Almost we might as well let self-indulgence wax fat and corruption have its way, even if the race might die out. Why take so much thought to add strength to our arms and a cubit to our stature that we might play the devil more efficiently?

I read the letter through again. I still have it. My correspondent was a representative type. In her fancy, and doubtless in many other people's, our Boy Scouts were the Empire-builders of the future, a Band of Youth being trained to carry a gigantic and triumphant Union Jack still higher, to the envy of an already sufficiently envious world.

But then other nations would, following our example, almost certainly start having 'Boy Scouts'. And then . . . !

When I had been a boy at school, Cadet Corps and Boy Scouts were equally unknown, uniforms and drilling and the sergeant-majors' pomp and scorn were a little looked down upon as rather continental. But now! Were all these uniforms and Cadet Corps progress? If so—then progress towards what?

CHAPTER XI

THE BRIDGE OF BOURG

Reveillé on September 13th was at four-thirty. The Aisne lay in front of us. Before eight that morning Pat Fitzgerald and his gallant machine-gunners and 'Sambo' Sewell with his squadron had rushed and captured the bridge that crosses the canal at Bourg. Sewell got wounded in the hand, but was quite indignant when I said he would have to go back that evening as wounded; in fact, he insisted in going on with the attack. Just after I dressed him and in the very moment of victory, Pat got a bullet straight between the eyes. I was only a few yards from him, trying to do something for Sergeant Langdon who had had the subclavian vein of his neck ripped open with a splinter, when someone shouted to me. Fitzgerald was unconscious when I got to him, his wound no bigger than a blue pencil mark in the centre of his forehead. Then in a moment he was gone. When things got quieter, I collected the small possessions in his pockets, tied them up in his green silk handkerchief, and gave them with his sword to someone that evening—I think it was Oldrey or Dunham the Quartermaster. Afterwards I heard they reached his wife and his mother, of whom he had so often spoken to me.

As I finished collecting Pat's possessions I found Tom Bridges alongside me.

'He *would* keep on looking over the top of the shield of his machine-guns,' I said. 'I'm terribly sorry.'

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Bridges shook his head. 'He has been lucky. Death in the moment of victory. Thousands will envy him before *this* war is finished!'

The bridge Sewell and Fitzgerald had captured crossed the canal only; the river lay beyond. This bridge was overlooked by high ground near the village of Bourg just across the river. As the road bridge over the River Aisne was demolished we had an uncomfortable quarter of an hour from cross fire—Corporals Knight and Baker and several others being killed—and might have been driven back again but for an aqueduct which carried the canal over the River Aisne. This was intact and had foot-walks or rather a towing path of cement which our reinforcements could use. Soon the Germans were in full retreat towards the wooded slopes and crests forming the far side of the Aisne valley, a strong position from which they were not to be completely dislodged until the last months of the War.

Although we had made a passage for the infantry who were beginning to cross over, they in turn would be in a tight place if the Germans counter-attacked and recaptured or destroyed any of the few bridges left, once they were across. With Carabineers and the 18th Hussars and 9th Lancers we cleared the woods near Soupier of German machine-gunners. With two troops of ours, Lieutenants Chance and Wright got to within half a mile of the Chemin des Dames. Later we returned to the point of a wooded spur on the northern bank of the Aisne overlooking Bourg. Fairly heavy firing began at Verneuil, Moussy, Chevy, and Braye, and towards Vailly and Chavonne on our left, and also on our right beyond Pargnan. The Germans were using heavy artillery, so their retreat had evidently stopped. Had they seriously counter-attacked that afternoon while the British Army straggled across the few unbroken bridges

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or swam the Aisne, things would have become very nasty.

We had halted on this wooden spur, with other cavalry nearby in the woods below us, without having received any very definite orders. The situation was still obscure when our General and some of his Staff suddenly appeared. He evidently thought the situation, especially the position of our infantry who had crossed over behind us, precarious. He made us a speech. What he said was not unlike his last message to us when we had been hanging on nearly surrounded at Gricourt outside St. Quentin. He wound up an exordium to us with:

'You must stay here at all costs! Everything may depend on you! Don't give an inch of ground. You may have to sustain seventy or eighty per cent of casualties! *Remain and die like gentlemen!*'

We looked at one another. 'Like gentlemen'—how else do people usually die? If, during one of our rapid retreats in August, we had all been shot in the back, would that death have been 'gentlemanly'? And why so much talk about dying? Death was the end for us all, in any case—even civilians. It is living—especially in war—that is so difficult, so tiresome and tedious. Dying is absurdly easy. Anyway, I hated this kind of speech; I thought it melodramatic, like a penny novelette. Ought one to be so critical? The General had been pleasant, even complimentary to me personally, although I imagine he suspected, perhaps having been brought up on Charles Dickens, that as a young doctor I was 'irreligious', immoral, and a heavy drinker. Was the situation really so bad? Or was he nervy? Nerves are contagious things.

Anyway, I know that, taking his message quite seriously, I got the 'wind up' properly; and thereupon began to make quite elaborate and feverish arrangements for an enormous battle. Around the trunks of the trees immediately behind our front I tied pieces of white bandage in a

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series of radiating lines converging to a glade near a cart-track through the woods, to which I decided the 'eighty per cent of wounded' should be brought. I then explained this system to the squadron and troop leaders, to the Horse Artillery units, and several other cavalry squadrons that were in the woods near us; so that all wounded men in the wood should find their own way or be carried back to this sheltered aid-post. The officers to whom I explained my 'battle-scheme' appeared anything but exhilarated. I don't know how many good bandages I wasted. Then instruments were got out and sterilized, a quantity of morphine tabloids dissolved, and other preparations made; but after watching for hours a heavy bombardment by the Germans of Verneuil, Moussy and other villages on our left on the north side of the river into which the British infantry were, we supposed, trying to penetrate, nothing whatever happened! Then, in a kind of anti-climax, we rode on towards Moulins where unfortunately Rivy Grenfell, one of the most gallant of the officers of the 9th, got killed.

The next day—*réveil* was again at 4 a.m.—we were in Paissy soon after seven, and there we had our first real taste of bombardment by the large German howitzers whose bursting shells we began to christen—according to our experience and taste—'Black Marias', 'Jack Johnsons', and 'Coal Boxes'. They began to drop around us as we rode through Moulins.

Pressing on, the Regiment tried to avoid this shelling by keeping close in under the sheer steep-to hillside. Here for an hour or two we halted. But the German planes had located us to a yard; even so, crowded in as we were against the side of the hill, their howitzers could only occasionally put up a sufficiently perpendicular shell. We began to get accustomed to the long moan changing to a whine, then to a scream, then the volcano-

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like eruptions. On all sides black fountains leaped up suddenly from the ground—columns of smoke, dust, earth and debris going up instantaneously with the flash; then came the ‘coal-box’s’ rumbling roar, as if a thousand clumsy housemaids had fallen down a thousand flights of stairs with loaded coal-scuttles, the ground quivering, the rocky escarpments of the Aisne echoing and re-echoing for miles. These ‘coal-boxes’ and ‘Black Marias’ would come over in salvoes of twos and threes; then methodically the German gunners would ‘search’ for us, ranging from end to end of each valley in huge diagonals, creeping ever nearer and nearer and nearer towards the brown mass of tightly-packed men and horses that cowered away from them under the shelter of the hill; searching until whole valleys were pock-marked with smoking craters ten feet wide.

This ordeal—our first day’s experience of halting in the open under heavy gunfire—was a fairly severe strain on the nerves. Though the shells themselves scarcely reached us, there was no shelter from the fragments—long razor-edged steel splinters of every size and shape that came whistling and skimming in all directions.

We as a regiment lost but few that morning, but before we had moved up the hill the Germans had done very serious damage to other units. Whole teams of our artillery horses lay dead about the hillside. It had begun to rain again, and Algerian troops, already drenched with the cold rain of the previous night, had had a bad time; their white clothing had been much too good a target for the German guns. With their faces, arms or legs partly torn away by shell wounds, they crawled pitifully amongst the bushes just above us. There was something pathetic about their doglike bewilderment, their wounds undressed, their white garments soiled and sodden, their hands numb, their teeth chattering. The French medical

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arrangements appeared to be conspicuous by their absence—they must have been all but non-existent for their Algerian troops, in particular. Here once more the clever French failed on three points: preparation, organization, and method. These, the three peculiar virtues of slow-witted folk, do not appeal to them. I do not remember seeing a single French doctor or ambulance man during my first fourteen days on the Aisne, while I spent quite half my time attending to the wounded amongst their Colonial troops and French artillerymen.

After we had had a few horses and men wounded we moved up to the village of Paissy on the hillside above. The bends in the long street, which was little more than a ledge on the hillside, could be enfiladed by distant shelling from our left. Houses were being set on fire, and the streets occasionally got plastered with shrapnel. Up here French and English infantry were mixed in some confusion. That day, and for eighteen days afterwards, dismounted cavalymen without either bayonets or entrenching tools were continually being rushed up to retake trenches, from which British and Algerian infantry had been driven out. It was not that cavalry were necessarily so much braver or more efficient, but because in such a hilly and wooded district cavalry could arrive practically on horseback in the firing line, fresh and unfatigued, after having been comfortably billeted all night in a village four miles away. Whereas the wretched infantryman, already jaded with his marching, had perforce to lie down in the mud on the spot and try to get what sleep he could in the drenching rain. Usually every evening we left the line, because our horses needed watering and cover from the rain. So for their sakes we would ride miles back to dry beds, comfortable and safe, to the envy of the infantryman.

Again and again in the touch-and-go struggles that

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were to follow both on the Aisne and at Ypres, dismounted cavalymen 'filled the gap', retook captured trenches, or saved apparently impossible situations. By our unexpected arrival, fresh and dry-skinned in the muddy woods on the heights of the Aisne, we checked many of the enemy's concerted attempts to cut off our infantry and artillery, and foiled every effort to recapture any of the bridges across the Aisne, only two or three miles behind us.

Entrenching tools we had none, so naturally trenches we had none. One day the Colonel (Mullens) and myself, not enjoying the splinters of the enemy's shells, were compelled to scrape a hole in the bank beneath some thorn bushes with jack-knives. I remember on one of the critical days on the heights of the Aisne, west of Paissy, passing along to the left a message that came to me from my right: 'Will "A" Squadron lend "C" Squadron *the spade?*'

Below at our feet, in the level ground between us and the Aisne, gleaming white in the sunlight and surrounded by a park, lay a large château, famous just before the War on account of the murder of its millionaire owner, Monsieur Calmette, the editor of the *Figaro*, by Madame Cailloux. We were to spend many unpleasant hours in that park while the Germans, suspecting our presence, methodically searched the whole place with some naval guns they had brought up to the Aisne.

We fidgeted and moved about, concealing ourselves as best we could amongst the not very abundant trees, while in lines of geometrical regularity at fifty yards intervals from east to west, from north to south, the German gunners pumped in their shells. As the explosions crept nearer and nearer to us one appreciated the feelings of the bound prisoner in Edgar Allen Poe's gruesome tale, *The Pit and the Pendulum*. It seemed so often an absolute

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certainly that eventually they must put a shell right in the very centre of the Regiment. One day, after an hour or two of this Aunt Sallying, the German artillery suddenly concentrated on a long line of wagons belonging to two Field Ambulances that were halted beside a high wall in a road outside the park, smashing several of the wagons and carts. No doubt they mistook them for regimental transport. At the distance they were firing from—about four or five miles—it is unlikely that they could have seen that some of the much-soiled wagon-covers were marked with the Red Cross.

Inside Monsieur Calmette's large ornate château, the Brigade of Guards were bringing their wounded. They were having heavy casualties, especially the Grenadiers, and someone came and asked me to go in and help. The rich crimson carpets in the large reception rooms were getting covered with mud. A steady stream of stretchers loaded with wounded was entering the mansion. A Guardsman and his kit on a stretcher makes a heavy load, and the Guardsmen stretcher-bearers were big tired men. So they came blundering into the mansion, crashing into beautiful doors of mahogany, teak and inlaid maple. Tulip-wood panels were being split, marble statues were toppling over, huge mirrors were cracked, tables of buhl and marqueterie were being overturned or piled high with muddy rifles, packs, bloodstained puttees and dressings. Nearly every room seemed to be full of wounded. Yet at any moment the whole place was likely to be shelled; because, though the Red Cross flag had been hoisted, some part of the Headquarters of the Guards Brigade were apparently occupying an outlying wing of the same building. The stream of signallers and Staff officers entering and leaving on one side made this obvious. Probably spies notified this to the Germans, for the place was eventually shelled.

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Sometimes in the letter, sometimes in the *spirit*, we broke the Geneva Convention; yet we so often railed at the Germans because they shelled buildings which were marked with the Red Cross—buildings which nearly every peasant and every spy in the village could see were not being very strictly kept entirely for use as hospitals.

Did the Germans ever *intentionally* bomb or shell any building or ship which they were *satisfied* was being genuinely used *solely* for the purpose of treating the sick and the wounded? I have never met any experienced soldier who thought that they did. On the other hand, much too often, one saw our Casualty Clearing Stations and Field Ambulance Dressing Stations with their ground signs or Red Cross flags brazenly displayed only a few yards from ammunition dumps, batteries of artillery or important railway junctions, all of which the Germans, of course, were fully entitled to bomb and shell. An error of a few yards, and they had hit one of our ambulances sandwiched in between fighting units. Nor were we very particular always as to exactly *whom* and *what* travelled by some of our hospital ships. Mailbags, important despatches, and convalescents—so very convalescent that they were certainly quite capable of doing some fighting—were to be found on them. On other hospital ships there certainly were many fit men, including reinforcements of R.A.M.C. personnel, who were *not* part of the normal crew. Were we entitled to use hospital ships as transports for taking out to our bases fresh personnel of the R.A.M.C., fresh supplies of stores, medical or otherwise, when we had declared all supplies and reinforcements to be contraband of war if they were being supplied to the Germans? Clearly, unless we were always most conscientiously scrupulous ourselves, the German spies would soon notify the German Admiralty that we were abusing the spirit of the Geneva Convention, and

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sometimes the letter, and we had no right to complain then that they no longer believed that with us the Red Cross only sheltered sick and wounded men. Would a single mailbag containing important military plans and despatches, strictly speaking, put a hospital ship out of court? And later we made a national heroine of Nurse Cavell, who, even her friends considered, had rather abused the neutrality of the Red Cross.

Many times afterwards this question would crop up. One of our field ambulances, having comfortably established itself in a derelict farm and hoisted a Red Cross flag over the buildings and placed a huge cross of red gravel in a field immediately alongside, would be followed three or four hours later by a battery of sixty pounders, who would proceed to establish themselves in a small copse immediately in the rear of the same farm buildings! The Germans, finding that our field ambulance was apparently sending them salvoes of iron pills, would send over a plane and locate the battery immediately in the rear of the ambulance, and then proceed to attempt to shell the former. As they would usually get the range of the battery by bracketing—'longs' and 'shorts'—they were practically bound to put some of the 'shorts' right into one of our barns filled up with patients on stretchers; whereupon the London papers would be filled with columns of abuse concerning the Hun having deliberately shelled or bombed one of our 'hospitals full of tortured men'!

Perhaps it is absurd for our House of Lords, as in recent debates, and other well-meaning folk to think that there can ever be any 'rules' in war *that will be kept*; either affecting submarines, or gas, or anything else. There soon comes to be but *one* rule in any war: 'Strike swiftly and strike often—strike hard and strike HOME!' You can afford to argue about the Geneva Convention *when* you have won.

CHAPTER XII

IN PAISSY'S CAVES

We English were bringing the Indians into the 'White Man's War', and the French, besides their Algerian troops—Spahis, Turkos, Zouaves—were busy bringing all sorts and conditions of coloured men, Sénégalais, Touaregs, Annamites, Malgaches and Negroes. Yet in both cases neither the form of warfare nor the climate was suitable for their profitable use.

The French shrugged their shoulders at the heavy casualties amongst their coloured troops; it was in any case safer to bring Arabs into the European War than to leave them in Africa, a possible prey to anti-French propaganda. They insinuated that we had had similar fears, a similar reason for bringing over many of the more warlike Indian regiments from India, lest as a result of news of some reverse sustained by our Army in Europe the Indian Army might be tempted to give trouble to the British officials in India. The scientific slaughter and the terrors of the 'White Man's' conflict might also be a warning to the coloured races not to dispute his authority.

September, 1914, was a miserable month on the Aisne, and the Arab soldiers naturally felt the climatic conditions more than we did. Drenched with cold rain, without food or medical aid, they squatted in the mud on the hillside round Paissy. Huddled up together like wounded animals supporting shattered limbs or badly mutilated

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faces, they were as pathetic a sight as the German wounded had been outside Braisne. Those sodden hillsides, strewn with dead horses and dead men, must have been a gruesome contrast to the sparkling waters and sunlit beaches of Mazagan, the bright silences of Ouargla, the whispering palm groves of Ghardaia and Sidi Okba.

There seemed to be no French doctors, so we had to do something for these wounded. Transport was not available to send them back into safety across the wide valley between us and the further side of the Aisne that was being constantly shelled. By chance we discovered behind the houses in this cliff village of Paissy a series of large caves which led back into the hillface behind, and which had evidently been used as granaries and stables. I and Maughan persuaded all the wounded we could see, French and English as well as Algerian, to get away from the exposed hillside up to these caves and wait there until we could dress their wounds. Fortunately the Algerians nearly all understood French, and soon, clambering and crawling, limping and hopping, they were coming up in scores. Like the prophets of old, we hid them by tens and fifties in the caves of Paissy where, in their saturated cotton clothing, they huddled close together for warmth. Eventually, in the person of a generous Commanding Officer of an English regiment, we found a raven to feed them.

Maughan and I dressed many of the more severely wounded. Unfortunately, the majority seemed either to have had no First Field Dressing, or to have used it for cleaning purposes, so it was necessary to deplete our own stores. As I had disobeyed the General's orders at Gour-nay, I still had in the medical cart a reserve of dressings and medical comforts, and, to eke out what I had, some of our infantry nobly but quite improperly gave up—about

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one man in every three—their own First Field Dressings for the Algerians. Many of these Arab soldiers, cold, hungry and faint from loss of blood, seemed quite numb mentally, scarcely able to appreciate what was happening. Allah the Just! Allah the Merciful! *He* evidently dwelt not in Europe! In Africa they had their tribal quarrels and hot personal feuds; but this dæmonic slaughter from a distance with iron shards on such a huge scale evidently struck them as only another exhibition of the terrible White Man's fits of cold-blooded madness. It was soon obvious many of them would die from cold and exposure following great loss of blood, more than from their actual wounds, unless we could get them some hot food. But for all these hundreds, what food? And from where? I discussed the difficulty with the Colonel commanding the Royal Sussex, who was grateful because we looked after some of his wounded officers and men. He showed a generosity and a readiness to help which one does not often meet; consulting his sergeant-major and adjutant he came back to me.

'Look here, you shall have half of all the soup we have just made in the regimental travelling cookers. We can always make some more, and my own men are quite agreeable. They have done pretty well to-day in the food line. If that's not enough, let me know.'

Soon we had camp kettles full of steaming hot soup in each cave, and the drenched Algerians were reviving. It was almost the first food—certainly the first hot food—many of them had had for days.

Finding a large unoccupied room in a house adjoining one of the largest of the caves, I had some of the worst cases needing operation, English and Arab, brought in. Some trestles and boards did duty for an operating table, and those awaiting their turn lay around the sides in some straw we collected. But we were soon disturbed.

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Shells began bursting in the street outside; several, grazing the roof, brought down showers of plaster and pieces of tile on to the patient on the operating table. In the midst of this, De Lisle and his Staff came in to enquire about some wounded officers. Two French officers, one a colonel, had been wounded that morning in the street outside. We had carried them into an archway to prevent their being hit again.

Calmly watching me operate, Captain B. T. Lawrence, V.C., 18th Hussars, lay in the straw. He was almost completely paralysed and numb from his neck downwards, with a jarred spinal cord having that morning been lifted some six feet or more into the air by a shell bursting in the ground just underneath him. He wanted to know how we could operate in such a noise and mess, but we were not attempting major operations and certainly not aseptic surgery!

Then, busy enough, we got a fresh alarm! Apparently the Germans had taken more of our trenches on the hill just above the caves, and had discovered from the admissions of a captured English officer—who luckily for himself had managed to escape again—that contrary to the Geneva Convention British officers who carried revolvers had on leaving England been actually issued with the blunt-ended, unhardened, or expanding bullets we used against Negroes, Afghans, and Chinese. At Tidworth on the outbreak of war we had all been astonished ourselves at this. These bullets, of course, make ghastly wounds and were specifically forbidden by a European Convention signed by us some years before the War. Why we started at the very beginning of the War breaking our promises I do not know; but anyway the Germans, having discovered it, now threatened to shoot all officers found with this illegal and mutilating form of ammunition in their pouches! The messenger, an officer, who

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ran in with this unpleasant news, was pessimistic. The East Yorks and another regiment had again been driven out of some trenches, and some fresh Algerian troops also. He blamed the latter most; they were unable to stand the combined effects of exposure, short rations, and heavy shellfire, and had let the British down. The Germans, having broken through, were, he said, at that moment coming along the road just north of the eastern end of the village. There was no time to be lost. I had to leave the Algerian I was operating on lying on the table, though several of his fingers were dangling from a shattered hand by mere strings of flesh, and dash round to every wounded officer, of whom there were a good many, some in the caves and some in the yard outside.

'Quick! Give me your ammunition. It'll save awkward questions if you give revolvers as well. They say the Germans have broken through again and have found out about our expanding revolver bullets!'

They all handed them over, only too willingly. I and a corporal ran with a load of this incriminating ammunition and the revolvers towards one of the larger caves, in the far recesses of which, some forty or fifty feet from the entrance, I had noticed there was a great fissure in the rock. The ammunition and the revolvers were bundled into this crevice. This I filled up with loose earth and rammed it down with the butt end of a rifle. I do not know how far the Germans really got, but it was not entirely a false alarm. After some heavy scrapping nearby they were apparently driven back. Those revolvers, as far as I know, must be still in that crevice.

Soon I was called away from the Algerian troops to look after a number of French artillerymen who had been wounded in the road just outside. The road through the village, as well as our trenches above, was being shelled

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again by the Germans who had now advanced on to a spur on our right. Soon the 4th Dragoon Guards were in the thick of it, trying to recapture trenches from which the West Yorks and some other regiments had been driven. We borrowed some stretchers from the infantry and got several of our wounded, including Sergeant Stainer and Corporals Keats and Regan of the 4th Dragoons, wounded through both legs, carried down into another cave. The whole hillside seemed to be honey-combed with these caves, some of them large enough to hold several ricks of barley, others just capable of stabling a couple of horses.

One youngster had been shot through the loin and the bullet, tearing its way out through the groin, had entered the thigh lower down just missing the main artery. He had been within thirty yards of a trench full of Germans. Alongside lay another 4th Dragoon Guard, Private Larkins of C. Squadron, with a penetrating wound of both lungs; we had brought him in during the afternoon. He lived all through the night, struggling painfully against the suffocating oozing of blood into his lungs. These two I remember particularly, because the one shot through the loin was so distressed by the gasping struggles of his comrade. We made flying visits to a group of wounded French artillerymen, and also to the caves full of Algerians and various wounded British infantry. The East Yorks had had several officers killed, and we had got their adjutant and three other officers wounded and some of the Sussex that we had collected in the village; doubtless the doctors of these regiments had been already wounded or were all too fully occupied. I did not know that the Dragoons and other cavalry left Paissy at dusk and returned to our more or less peaceful billets four miles away in Longueval; it was distinctly bad soldiering to be separated from unit and food at the same time.

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About 10 p.m., unable to find the regiment and rather tired, I decided to lie down beside the wounded men of my own unit in the small cave in which I had put them, and try to get some sleep; but the crackle of rifle fire on the hilltop above us was incessant. Outside was the crashing of shells and the flickering reflection on the sky of the burning haystacks and buildings. Above all, the sense of tension and constant alarms about 'Germans making bayonet charges' and 'breaking through' made sleep rather difficult.

At last I gave up any attempt; every time I had managed to doze off the terrible sucking, gasping noises made by the poor fellow alongside, wounded in the lungs, aroused me.

'Are you asleep, sir?' the man wounded in the groin asked me.

'No, it's no good, Blank. It is better to keep awake. Some ambulance wagons might risk coming up from Moulines now it's dark. Some of you can get away to the Field Ambulance on the other side of the Aisne.'

'I would rather stay where I am in here, sir, now. They're probably shelling Moulines still. Those ambulance wagons go so slowly—they would be almost certain to be hit on that narrow road. The Germans must know by this time that the wood near Moulines is full of French batteries. Do you think I shall live, sir?'

'Yes,' I said, not altogether truthfully.

'And Robbie?' he indicated the man on the other side. I shook my head; Robbie was already unconscious.

'But—if I live—I am all gone underneath, sir.'

I did not answer him. It's not easy to persuade either female or male that sex mutilation is not vital. He was from his voice and expressions evidently an educated man. After a silence he startled me with quite a different question.

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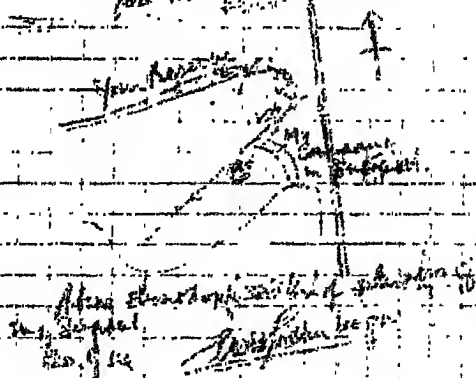
06

Wash. Post

I am sending a Company to support
you - convinced in your rightness. They
are experiencing as hard as they can in order
to stay here.

The French intelligence is probably, sure,
temporary - they are back to the front
to the extent of the shale here.

You may hear



Message found in cave at Paissy during German attack
on September 20th, 1914.

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'Do you believe in Christ, sir?'

'I think I do.'

'You believe He actually lived?'

'Yes! Anyway, I admire His teaching.'

'Do you think, sir, that in spirit He is living now?'

'Yes, Blank, I think I do. Perhaps He has to begin his ministry afresh in everyone's heart.'

'You believe, sir, in His second coming?'

I hesitated. Should one conceal from a possibly dying man one's true opinions. Yet I had often thought that this so-called Second Advent was not a dramatic personal arrival, but is achieved in each of us at the moment in which we begin to feel kinship and sympathy with all that strives and suffers. I parried this question unskillfully.

'Then you don't actually believe in His Second Coming?'

I said I didn't think there would be any second *public* appearance of that particular Christ, but that another Christ with the same spirit and mission might be amongst us already.

He explained to me that his mother had wanted him to enter the Methodist ministry.

'Why, sir, do you think that God allowed this war? If He exists as well as Christ—you do believe in a God as well as a Christ, don't you?'

I felt I was rather being driven into a corner. Could I explain to this man that for me 'God' was but the sum total of all the kindlier feelings in each and all of us, that perhaps 'He' grows with their growth, suffers when we suffer, fails with our failure. To me 'Christ' symbolized the sufferings and obstacles which this 'God', this better Spirit, must struggle through during its evolution and development. I knew I was unorthodox and had no authority for my point of view. It was only my way of

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looking at the thing. But my questioner was persistent.

'Do you, sir, as a doctor, think the soul is something quite separate from the body?'

I remember I said something to the effect that the soul may not be separate or separable from the body. It may be only the name for one of our body's highest functions. We knew so little about either the one or the other. The soul may be but a mystical name for the evolutionary seed, the developmental urge—or rather our consciousness of it. I was hazy myself as to what was meant by the saying 'I know that my Redeemer liveth'. Might that not mean that 'our Redeemer' was our own soul, the evolutionary seed in us of coming things, a future and a greater freedom—the Kingdom of Heaven that was within. Evidently my reply was halting and unsatisfactory.

'Then you don't believe, sir, that it is Christ's death alone that redeems us from our sins?'

I did not know what to say. Could one give an answer to a man who, because I was older and a doctor and an officer, would probably give undue weight to my opinions. What did parsons mean when they talked about redemption from sin? What 'sins' had this youngster committed who lay beside me with his thigh and stomach bandaged, who had risked everything for a country and institutions out of which he himself got no very great benefit. Probably this lad had not committed any real 'sins'; his earnestness in questioning me about my unorthodox religious beliefs was surely proof that he was not himself really bad. And yet how monstrous was this assumption that any 'good' could come to mankind because a young Teacher had been brutally done to death in Galilee two thousand years ago. Could a mean and brutal action ever be directly or indirectly beneficial to the human race? I knew I did not believe it could be. The

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crucifixion of Christ could only have added another 'sin' for the human race to bear. One cannot wash away brutality in more bloodshed and more suffering.

Also, was there not something shabby in thinking that we and our descendents would avoid any of the consequences immediate and remote of our stupidities and cruelties because we chose to believe that the butchery of a young Prophet two thousand years ago in some way intercepted or prevented the natural consequences of our misdeeds? Could anything more demoralizing for young or old be preached than the doctrine that we could somehow evade the due reward of our injustice and cruelties? For two thousand years this doctrine had been taught to the youth of Europe. What had been the effect? It did not look as if Europe was any better for the Christian's convenient theory of a vicarious sacrifice. In the pre-Christian world there had been a more moral conviction that Nemesis was never cheated—that in particular the consequences of cruelty and injustice were repaid to the uttermost farthing, and that none could escape therefrom.

My failure to reply to his question had evidently diverted the wounded man's thoughts, for presently he asked me whether I thought the War would go on for a long time. I reminded him that it had taken the British Empire some years to defeat forty or fifty thousand Boer farmers, so I did not see why we should be disheartened because we had not defeated several million Germans, Turks and Austrians in six weeks.

I dozed a little. Then a shell burst not far from the entrance to our cave. The flash lit up all its dark recesses, the hooks holding farm implements, horse collars, cages full of pigeons, and baskets slung on ropes which we afterwards discovered formed nests for the poultry. At the same time I heard shouts outside. Apparently the concussion had shaken down a part of the roof of an

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adjoining cave on to some of the soaked and wounded Algerians huddled together in their uneasy slumber. Alarmed at such an awakening, those who could had run out of the cave, others streamed after them, crawling and hopping on their stumps and lacerated limbs, the bright glare from the still smouldering building, which I had used as an hospital that afternoon, lighting up their haggard brown faces and the whites of their eyes. Many whom Maughan and myself had spent hours on, washing and dressing their lacerated wounds, were now covered with earth and muck from the cages. Farm implements and rows of nesting boxes that had been fastened to the sides of the cave had been shaken down, injuring some of the more helpless of the wounded. It was rather pitiable, this frantic crowd of Arab soldiers, their white burnous stained with blood and mud, running distractedly hither and thither in that red glare, calling out and praying to Allah, Allah the Merciful. Some, quite hysterical, were kneeling down and sobbing before those caves as if they prayed to the very earth to rise up and cover them from the hatreds of men. There was nothing to be done except to try and quieten them and help those who came tottering along into some of the other caves. A fierce roar of artillery half drowned the angry crackle of sustained rifle-fire on our right; the Germans were evidently getting round there again. The valley below, between us and Moulins, was flashing with bursting shells. There was no way of getting the wounded away; I would just have to wait.

I went back and lay down again beside the two wounded men. I daresay I was overtired, but how futile now seemed our discussion about the reality of Christ; one could only feel sorry for Him who had endured so much and so miserably failed! Was not everything a gigantic leg-pull? Satan had indeed conquered—the

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world had turned dark—we were all of us, patriots, priests, soldiers, all of us, on the wrong road! Yet perhaps it was only pessimism to think the world was getting worse. I thought of a conversation I had had on a troopship once with a senior officer who had served in the Burmese War and who had entered the Army at a time when the average man in the ranks really was a rough customer. This officer's tale may have been exaggerated yet it somehow matched the misery of that evening and in gruesomeness surpassed it.

He told me that the march up-country through the jungle to Mandalay had been a ghastly business. The Burmese village folk intensely resented the invasion of their country, and a relentless guerilla warfare was carried on in which both sides were absolutely merciless. When any spies were caught—and to our men any Burman who was not in uniform and who, as was then customary in Burma, carried a weapon, was liable to be treated as a spy—they were tortured to force a confession. Malaria, dysentery, and cholera dogged the steps of our weary troops. Service in the British Army in those days was arduous, and in the fear that our men would find the Burmese women too attractive and amiable and would desert into the jungle, which they could easily have done, our troops had been filled up with foul propaganda against the Burmese and their alleged fiendish and habitual cruelty as heathens to Christian white people.

This officer told me what had happened when at length after forced marches we had entered Mandalay. Our men were in no mood for kid gloves. Infuriated by the treatment which the Burmese had given to the men they had captured—our own behaviour had been the same—our troops, drunk with rum and toddy, had burst into the King's vast palace at Mandalay and had exacted a terrible vengeance from the household of the King of

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Burma for their hardships and sufferings—though, after all, we were the invaders. We had treated these 'sensual, almond-eyed, brown-skinned idolaters' as the Israelites had treated the Canaanites of old. It was a terrible reprisal. Every man and boy in the King's palace had been, he declared, stabbed to death with bayonets; that was understandable, for almost certainly these Burmese would not have stopped at treachery to rid themselves of the white-faced 'barbarian' invader. But the hundred Maids of Honour, huddled terrified in a corner of the palace at the coming of the fierce white-faced barbarians, had been ruthlessly seized, thrown upon the floor, and many of them raped to death. My informant assured me that our troops, white and black, were not only drunk with toddy and lust, but mad with rage; that even while these girls were being brutalized to their death other soldiers were tearing or cutting off their ears, because almost every one of the girls wore as earrings a pair of the huge almost priceless pigeon-blood rubies of Mogouk. The screams of these terrified girls and the murderous scene seemed to live in his memory. But I assumed, anyway hoped, it was an exaggeration because like many who had served in Burma in those days he used to drink a good deal. Years afterwards, in a village outside Mandalay, I was to hear his tale repeated by a handsome old dame who crouched before me with a tray loaded with lacquer and silverware for sale; she claimed, and her aristocratic appearance supported her claim, that she had been one of the few ladies of the court who, after witnessing part of this terrible scene from a hiding place in the palace roof, had ultimately escaped.

After all, in a world that was ruthless and greedy, probably such things were inevitable. Why worry! And if the Englishman's God hated the heathen as we had been taught to believe, why shouldn't the Englishman

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exterminate the Canaanite and the 'idolater' and possess the earth?

Among the fairest of women the Burmese girl is certainly one of the sweetest and most affectionate in disposition and most graceful in movement. Whether praying on the pagoda platform, waiting at a wayside station, or presiding at her minute stall in the glare of the market place, there is a smile upon her lips and laughter in her eyes, always just the right-coloured flower in her hair to match the bronze or crimson of the silk fold that does duty as a skirt, the apple-green of her sleeved coatee, or the shell pink of the tight-fitting little vest underneath. One must have a heart of stone not to fall in love with them. But the English Army was in those days so largely recruited from the coarser and more brutal of the 'down-and-outs'. Even English public houses advised the London underworld that 'dogs and soldiers' were not admitted.

The late September dawn broke fine and cold. The German attack had died down after midnight, and there was less firing in the valley around Moulins. About nine o'clock some ambulance wagons reached Paissy. The lad with the wounded lungs had gasped his life away. The ex-divinity student had been taken off; I doubted if he would survive the journey in the wagon on the bumpy, shell-pitted road between Paissy and Vieil D'Arcy.

We buried poor Larkins who had died beside me in the corner of an orchard on the road just below Paissy; I tied two sticks together in a cross to mark the spot, and drew on the inside cover of his Small Book with a marking-ink pencil a plan of the village and the point where we had buried him, and gave it to his Squadron Sergeant-Major, hoping it might ultimately reach his family—it was not often one had the time to do even this

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much. I managed to organize four stretcher squads and searched the hill for wounded of the West Yorks; altogether we found forty wounded of different units, several of them able to walk with assistance. Then I started to ride back to Longueval, whither I heard the Regiment had returned the night before.

I had crossed the pontoon bridge at Bourg, the Germans shelling it but their range much too short and was riding along, cold, unshaven and hungry, when I heard a cheery voice. It was Major Solly-Flood, with a basket of food. He had troubled to ride out to find me, although he must have had a dozen other things to think of, and was full of regrets that no one had warned me when the Regiment moved off. He supposed I had been all night under fire on the crest of the ridge which the Germans were endeavouring to capture, and was still there. I told him I had been safe and dry in a cave most of the night.

'Well, anyhow, you look pretty gummy,' and he insisted then and there on my having a gulp of brandy from his flask. Arthur Solly-Flood—'Solly' his friends called him—was romantic, agreeable, humorous, good-tempered; what the French call *bon garçon*. He must have had a trying time as second in command, our C.O. so often being called upon at a moment's notice to take over the command of the whole Brigade, sometimes without the necessary Brigade Staff. Naturally he had then to use two or three of his own Regimental Headquarters Staff. Sometimes I went myself with urgent messages to our Horse Batteries or to find and give orders to the Transport. These sudden devolutions of command meant that Solly was left at critical moments in command of a cavalry regiment with its squadrons dispersed and without a proper Headquarters Staff.

The control of a regiment of cavalry in war when it is doing the work of about four regiments—retaking in-

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fantry trenches or scattered about in troops and squadrons in all directions on first one duty and then another—is enough to try the mildest temper and the steadiest nerve.

The last time I saw ‘Solly’ he was seated on a pile of potatoes in a small open shed at Le Gheer, near Ploegsteert. Quite half of the officers and men of the Regiment were either wounded or missing. He looked haggard and ill, was unshaven, obviously overtired, but still he had a humorous twinkle in his eye, was still alert, confident, even optimistic. We were being heavily shelled, and the Germans had cut off a part of the Regiment and some of the 9th Lancers in five houses at the far end of Le Gheer. A battalion—I think the Inniskillen Fusiliers—were not doing too well and had gone back on our right, not having, like us, the cover of the villas. Owing to some misunderstanding, there seemed also to be no one at all for four hundred yards on our left. The Germans were plumping shells into the woods behind where our horses were sheltering, trees were crashing in every direction, and the shells were bursting so near us in this shed that the incandescent gasses of their explosives shot out great tongues of flame, whose hot breath one could actually feel. Yet he sat there directing operations, and chaffing me—I was acting temporarily as Mess Secretary—because the previous day Romer Williams and I had bought for the mess a plump young sucking pig at La Petite Douve Farm—and five minutes after we had paid for it, scandalized at the bursting of a German shell, it had jumped out of my arms and bolted into Ploegsteert Wood.

CHAPTER XIII

COMPANIONS IN MISFORTUNE

On the Aisne one first began to notice the growing effect of 'nerves'. Often it was evident in those in whom one least expected to find it. One in particular, I remember, by no means lacking in ordinary courage, became afflicted like the Assyrians of old with a sense of impending disaster—a besetting panic that he could neither resist nor dissemble. Like the confidence of those cohorts 'gleaming in purple and gold', the nerves of this officer who had played bridge with Grand Dukes and polo with Kings 'melted away' because of the rustling of the treetops, the mysterious whisperings of the night breezes in the dark forests of Vendresse. Suspicious creepings and cracklings in the gloom of the woods—so suggestive, sinister and convincing, if you only allow yourself to listen long enough—would unreasonably disturb him.

Good-looking, wealthy, amiable, a perfect horseman, a good raconteur and liked by all, those who knew him felt sorry for him, sorry that he of all men should be unable to hide the feelings which so many of us shared.

Sometimes I would come across him and the Regiment he commanded, holding a wooded crest, the German trenches some two or three hundred yards away, and night descending. He was always pleased to see anyone; his cigarette case and whisky flask were for all comers.

'What's that?' he would suddenly ask.

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We would both listen intently.

'Oh,' I might suggest, 'only some of those Grenadier Guards looking for pine-cones to light a fire to warm up their rations.'

'Oh, damn the Guards! They must be mad to light any sort of fire up here. It only draws artillery fire. We've had quite enough of that to-day. Those *beastly* shells!'

Presently he would touch my shoulder.

'Listen! *That* can't be the Guards! They're on our left. It's those damned Germans creeping round my right flank—there's a wooded ravine there! I hate doing this infantry work in broken country, and without bayonets or entrenching tools. I hate infantry soldiering! It's all rot my having to bring my squadrons up here. What the hell can unentrenched cavalrymen do in a wood against machine-guns and all this shelling by eight-inch howitzers?'

I had long since got over the worst of these panicky feelings. Having made a very bedfellow of Fear, one got used to the harlot. Besides, it might, for all I cared, 'snow pink'. The Germans could pump thunder in hell, if they felt like it, till doomsday. As far as I was concerned they might have the whole earth. It was an absurdly overrated, even undesirable, possession; especially when considered in a damp and muddy wood on a cold night in late September.

As I listened one evening to this nervous brother officer talking, I could not help wondering why we, any of us, cared so much what happened. It certainly looked now as if our world was not going to be any longer a desirable place to live in.

It is hard to be really sympathetic with the panic-stricken, but agreeable enough to meet someone who is evidently more frightened than oneself. My companion

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had influence. Fear in high places usually meant a job at the Base and 'happy ever afterwards'; which certainly, though he was too fidgety, this most amiable man deserved to be.

Sheltering beneath some overhanging rocks between Soupir and Chavonne on the banks of the Aisne, while the Germans, because our four hundred horses always gave our position away, pounded us with their artillery, a man was suddenly rushed up to me by two other Dragoons who declared he had gone mad from fright just after a shell had burst amidst the rocks behind him. The man, covered in a heavy sweat, gibbering and pointing in an astonishing way, had suddenly lost all power of speech. I heard afterwards he had been munching some ration biscuit just as the shell burst. The Colonel, who was sitting beside me, got up, interested in such an unusual phenomenon, even in war, as sudden lunacy. I did not know what I was expected to do; but clearly, being a doctor, I was expected by everybody around to do something and do it at once! I had studied lunacy under Sir George Savage, but I must confess that at that moment my ideas concerning the emergency treatment of lunacy on a battlefield became suddenly nil. What would Sir George have done if someone went suddenly mad and was brought to him while a crowd of his comrades stood attentively to watch him perform a miracle? I believe Savage, who had an enormous sense of humour, would just have laughed—and he had a most infectious laugh!

For a moment or two I stood quite helplessly looking at the man. Fortunately, after gibbering incoherently and evidently very much frightened, he began pointing and grabbing at his mouth. By this time quite a proportion of the Regiment had gathered round, distinctly per-

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turbed at the prospect that any one of them at any moment might suddenly become a raving lunatic. I actually overheard one or two men muttering indignantly to each other: 'If this sort of thing is going to happen, we can't possibly go on with this war.' For want of something more intelligent to do I put my fingers into the man's mouth, thinking he might have got a piece of food wedged there, and immediately discovered that his jaw was dislocated. In a second or two—it is a very easy operation—I had depressed the back part of his jaw and it slipped back with a click into its socket, whereupon the man, suddenly 'sane' again, and much relieved, began thanking me most profusely, to the amazement of the onlookers. As so often happens, I got more kudos for this sort of thing than for other things less spectacular but far more arduous.

That evening, or the next, we were standing dismounted in the rain behind some trees near Moulins, when a man close to me suddenly fell to the ground with blood pouring from his mouth. The men round him were rather disturbed. What fresh German devilry was this! As no shot had been fired, and ruptured aneurisms in young men are very rare, I could not imagine what could have happened. Wide-eyed, the men continued to gather round their comrade who lay blenched and speechless in the mud. Again, entirely by good luck, I discovered the cause. I put my finger into his mouth and found that he had a bullet firmly wedged—almost buried—in the right tonsil. I discovered afterwards from another man who had been standing behind him, that he was looking upwards and yawning just before he fell stricken to the ground. The only possible explanation was that a spent bullet from a rifle fired perhaps a mile away had, descending almost vertically, dropped clean into his mouth. As someone afterwards remarked: 'If Bill had

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only had better manners he would have got that bullet in his hand and gone home for three months.' Fortunately I did not attempt to draw the bullet out on the spot, but left him with a note for the Field Ambulance. I heard later from the Field Ambulance at Villers that the bullet was extracted, but not without dangerous bleeding from the tonsilar artery.

Running along a road west of Paissy that was being shelled, I tripped over the traces belonging to a team of six artillery horses lying dead in a heap. I grazed my knee rather badly, and my pocket-case—replenished in Paris—and full of surgical instruments, shot out of my pocket. I was busy picking up some of the precious contents, phials of morphia and strychnine that were scattered all over the road, and did not hear the whine of an approaching shell till somebody on the side of the road shouted at me. I went flat just as a shell burst close to the dead horses. The man who shouted was a wounded gunner, his knee damaged by the shell that had knocked out his team. Both of us got peppered with dust and stones from the road, and he, standing up to shout his warning, got also a nasty welt on the side of the head from a big metal buckle blown from the harness of the team. Though it left an ugly blue mark on his left temple he said it did not hurt him much. It was a very nasty exposed corner of the mountain road looking toward Troyon, and for a long time we crouched together in a recess behind a rock while they shelled the road all round.

When I left my friend sitting with his back against the rock, he said he felt all right except that his knee ached and he had a headache. I tied the usual piece of bandage to a post opposite and told him to keep a look-out for some ambulance wagons that were due to come along when things got quieter and take him back to the Field Ambulance at Pont d'Arcy.

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That afternoon we were out on a ridge to the eastward of Paissy. Salvoes of shells were being poured into an old mill close under the opposite cliff, which the Germans believed we were occupying but was in fact unoccupied. The shells hitting the solid rock sent showers of big splinters in all directions. Some rebounding sideways from the rock came close up to where the C.O. and I were sitting. I later measured the distance—it was twelve hundred and fifty yards. Once near Bullecourt in May, 1917, I measured again the distance a splinter of German shell had covered. It fell harmlessly to the ground within a yard or two of myself and one of my own men. The distance travelled after the explosion was just under fifteen hundred yards.

The ridge we were on was the abrupt edge of a grassy tableland, and up there Major Bridges suddenly discovered he liked country walks. That afternoon he certainly excelled himself. He is a big man, he must be over six-foot-three, but he walked about almost on the skyline, taking, as he described it, 'just a look at those German trenches'. He came back at intervals to report to the Colonel what he had seen. We listened with respect to his reports, for C. Squadron which Bridges commanded had not only done good work at St. Quentin, but on the Aisne it had certainly saved the local situation at least twice by retaking single-handed trenches which several British and Algerian regiments had had to abandon owing to heavy losses and enfilading fire.

Bridges always came back from his walks with something cheerful to tell us. The German trenches were 'nearly empty'. Twice he suggested I should come for one of these 'walks' with him, and see for myself. Twice, rather depressed at the very idea, I declined. 'But I'm sure it would interest you,' he urged. Then I watched him calmly mount again to the skyline and walk along it

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unconcernedly, a tall and solitary figure. The only reason he was not riddled with bullets must surely have been that very few of the Germans in the daytime ever put their heads over the tops of their trenches. Any German who might that day have done so would in a hasty glimpse have noticed an immense Englishman in uniform calmly strolling about on the skyline *with only a walking stick*. Probably, gathering from Bridges's carefree stride the panic-stricken notion that the English must have already captured all the other trenches on the right and left, the German thereupon bolted, spreading as he ran the disastrous news amongst his comrades.

But each time Bridges came back Mullen's said reproachfully:

'Tom, you must look out; remember, there's a lot of you to get hit!'

'Really, Colonel, there is no danger; their trenches seem quite deserted!'

This sounded extremely comforting, considering their trenches were only about two hundred yards away and that we had only one man to about every three yards, no barbed wire in front of us, no bayonets, no trenches, and the possibility of being cut off in any attempt to retreat across the Aisne. The German artillery had by this time got every bridge across the Aisne carefully taped off, and could have smashed up any or all of them whenever they chose with their heavy artillery. Occasionally they smashed up one or two just to show us what they could do if they felt inclined. This made us thoughtful. Yet there had been many signs that at this stage of the War the Germans were short of shells for their heavier guns.

Major Bridges's sangfroid was exceptional. I never heard he had been especially an athlete. Sometimes the most nervous were noted athletes—men who had got 'caps' and other distinctions in rugby and tennis. The

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yachtsmen and the big-game shooters came out, I thought, rather better. To sail single-handed a yawl-rigged open boat in half a gale off the Lizard, or to be alone in mountains and desert places with only the stars to guide you, developed greater powers of self-confidence, concentration, and endurance. The qualities acquired on the cricket field and the fives court—catlike agility, accuracy of vision and touch and dependence on others in the team—seem, morally speaking, almost negligible because less likely to develop self-dependence, intelligence, independence of judgment and will-power. To attempt to defeat, and to that extent humiliate, another human being, can hardly be morally improving; anyway, it is a very different thing from pitting oneself alone against the merciless and almost irresistible forces of nature.

The herd instinct, so finely developed in cattle and in the wolf-pack, and which finds its expression among men in the so-called 'team-work', undoubtedly aids unreflecting unanimity of execution. But where inside such a system can arise, the originality of thought, the initiative that is so essentially individualist, and without which either in war or peace the onrush of a well-drilled mob must lead only to futility or disaster?

Relieved that evening from the front line, we rode back over the road I had come up by. As we passed the place where I had left the wounded gunner, I noticed the bandage I had tied to the post was gone. Glancing back at the recess where I and my rescuer had sheltered, I was astonished to see him still sitting there propped up against the rock and without his cap. I rode back towards him. But the flies were already busy. Was it the blow from the buckle on his temple or some result of the wound of his knee, which from the state of the dressings had obviously

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been bleeding again? I felt indirectly responsible for his death. But for my clumsiness which had necessitated his rising with his injured knee to warn me, and which had also resulted in his getting a nasty blow on the head, he might have been alive when the ambulance called for him.

On the ride back to Bourg I began thinking of another who had once befriended me, and whose rough grave I had come upon afterwards

Amongst my fellow troopers in South Africa there had been a sturdy red-cheeked lad who came from the Somerset-Dorset border. He, Bidgood, usually rode next to me in the ranks and was one of the bravest and kindest-hearted youngsters.

I was smaller and more inexperienced, far less used to roughing it than Bidgood, who had spent all his life on his father's farm. What with foul water and quarter rations covered with sand and dust *and* the flies, one by one we all went sick with chronic dysentery. As I became weak and exhausted, Bidgood would often help me to mount my plunging half-trained horse—a vicious brute from the Argentine—that had already lamed two men. He was a marvel at finding shelter and food in all those weary weeks in which for our sole rations we were lucky if we got a biscuit and a quarter a day, and anything else we could find on the burnt and pillaged farms. Once, for four days, we had no rations except a handful of flour. We had scarcely any water to drink, and foul at that. Though we always got in dead-tired, Bidgood, if he were not on guard, would go off every evening after our horses were picketed, and come back with his arms full of half-ripe pumpkins, prickly pears, or stale chupatties, which he had discovered in some ruined farm or deserted Kaffir hut. Once he actually returned with a crayfish and some ripe Indian corn: that had been a real feast, though half starved as we were, we were both violently sick after-

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wards. Always he would share and more than share with me everything he found. Often when on the rocky ground we lay shivering together at night without tents or even overcoats and with only the numnahs of our saddles propped over us to keep the frost from our faces, he would insist on my taking part of his also, for a pillow. The nights on the bare, stony ground were bitter. The water in our canvas buckets was often frozen into a solid block in the morning; even the straps of our saddlery were frozen stiff and unmanageable. Because in the black frost and searching wind our feet were icy cold, I would empty the oats from my horse's nosebag into his, and we would both try to get our feet into mine. Even then, tired out as we were, our feet would be so cold we could not sleep.

Comradeship and kindness shown when you are but a private soldier and of no account are unforgettable.

Bidgood distinguished himself at the relief of Wepener. Then, out of the hunger and thirst and wretchedness of that squalid little war against the Boers, the gods took him in his prime. In a treeless waste of rocks on one of those sun-scorched deserted South African plains—somewhere by 'Thaba'nchu's lonely mountain on this side Caledon River—there is a pile of stones in a silent valley.

When men are together in hardship—freed from the cramping and cynical conventions of society, and freed too from the vicious rivalry and lowering competition for female favours—there can blossom out in their characters superlatives of courage and unselfishness rarely found under what we pretend are more civilized conditions. The friend who sticketh closer than a brother becomes a reality.

We could not make the Germans budge. The position

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they were in was almost impregnable, whereas with a broad river swollen by the late September floods, and crossed by only a few makeshift bridges, close behind us, we felt anything but secure. And now we had our first taste of the bitterness of stalemate, the futile routine of mud and slaughter. The days dragged on with ugly rumours concerning the incompetence of Russian leadership and the pressure of the German Armies in the direction of the Channel ports.

Our attempts to break through the German lines weakened as did their attempts to drive us back across the Aisne. The fighting, as trenches began to be strengthened, grew gradually less bitter and less intense. The Germans at last seemed content to look down on our trenches from the heights of the Aisne as they were to do afterwards from the ridges of Pilkem, Messines, and Aubers and the high ground at Vimy, Bullecourt, Thiepval, and Montauban.

One afternoon, the Regiment being in reserve and the front fairly quiet, three of us got the chance of a lift in the General's private car to Rheims, the driver, an American pressman to whom the car apparently belonged, and a friend of General de Lisle, having agreed to drive us in. As we arrived in the square outside the Cathedral, the Germans recommenced their bombardment, so we took refuge in one of the great champagne cellars that run under the streets of the city. Here and there German shells had plumped through the vaulted cellar roofs, and many scores of bottles of champagne were lying about smashed. Most of the champagne, of which we all were offered as much as we wanted, was rather too sweet; yet afterwards I wished that I had drunk more, the drive back would then have been a little less nerve-racking. Leaving the others, I went to look at the Cathedral. The interior woodwork was still smouldering, but the outside

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was nearly intact. The Germans had, it was said, discovered that the French were using the spire as an artillery observation post, having at the same time, to protect the Cathedral, hoisted a Red Cross—using the interior as a hospital! The Germans in this unpleasant dilemma had—so *they* claimed—sent warning to the French Commander that if he continued to use any part of the Cathedral for observation purposes they would smash the towers and roof with shellfire. I suppose we shall never know if this was true or not. They had certainly made a ruin of the interior.

Inside I picked up handfuls of large pieces of the wonderful and priceless stained glass that was scattered in the ashes and debris on the stone floor. I was just leaving when I noticed a French General who had followed me in, filling a white linen bag like a pillow case with what looked like flat discs of lead, some of them about twice the size of a five shilling piece.

‘Why don’t you pick up some of this too?’ he said, noticing I had only got pieces of stained glass.

‘But it’s only lead!’

‘Not at all! It is the remains of the silver statue of Jeanne d’Arc which melted while the Cathedral was on fire and has come down all over the floor in these great drops.’

I quickly filled my handkerchief with these discs splashed about amongst the ashes, and having got perhaps a pound or a pound and a half in weight, went off highly pleased with my souvenirs. Alas, in our forced marches northward a week afterwards we had to keep on reducing everything superfluous, and my servant not being even sure that such rubbish could belong to me, thinking it was in any case but a collection of lead and broken glass, left the bundle behind in one of the cottages we had been billeted in—I believe in Villers Bocage.

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Returning towards Bazoches from Rheims we had an exciting ride. The driver of the car we had come out in was taken suddenly ill with fever, and I told him he must rest for the night in Rheims. But it was absolutely essential that we others whom he had brought should rejoin our regiment before nightfall; so we were only too pleased to accept the offer of a stray motorist to take us back. He was certainly a peculiar-looking individual, driving a long narrow rather dilapidated grey car. We heard afterwards that he was one of the most eccentric and reckless officers in the French flying corps; and within five minutes of getting into his car I already suspected it. He covered the shell-pitted, bumpy—and in places partly destroyed—road between Rheims and our new billet at Mont St.-Martin, without lights at scarcely less than fifty miles an hour, the car swaying so much that those of us sitting behind were nearly flung out as we went round the corners. He was deaf to any suggestion of moderating his pace; perhaps it *was* a moderate pace to an aviator. Or perhaps he was just showing off, determined to alarm some of the slow-moving English officers. He certainly succeeded. Two of us at least agreed that being shelled by Germans was far pleasanter and certainly less dangerous than being driven by a Frenchman. Doubtless there are things more nerve-racking than being driven at a great speed on a bad road by a wild individual in whom you have not the least confidence, but there surely can't be a great many.

Though it was a very wet September there were some days towards the end of the month that were close and thundery; our wounded, many of whom had been lying out in front of us between Troyon and Vauciere, must have suffered terribly both from the bitter nights in the drenching rain and from thirst. Some had been lying out

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there ever since our first attacks of September 13th, 14th and 15th. Several men who went out at night to bring them in never returned; almost certainly they got hit themselves or lost their way and blundered into the German lines. Some of the wounded men in the West Yorks whom I was dressing told me that a wounded man in front of their lines had been moving his arm for some days and they could just hear him calling feebly at night for help. Poor devil, I suppose he could hear the English voices in our trenches. One of the West Yorks had crawled out at night but could not find him. On the next day he had volunteered to go out again with a water bottle full of water. He actually got to within thirty yards of the wounded man when one of our own shells, bursting close by, knocked him silly. When he came to, he found the water bottle with the cork still in, but quite empty. A small, sharp splinter must have holed it. Eventually he reached the wounded man, who had been hit in the stomach and thighs, and was so weak he could only just whisper, his wounds in a ghastly state of decomposition from the constant rain, spells of hot sunshine, and the flies. He had evidently been there for a long time and perhaps been at first strong enough to get at his emergency ration.

The would-be rescuer got scarcely an answer to his 'Hullo, mate!' though the wounded man could still move a little. After a bit the West Yorkshireman had to crawl back again. The poor devil's stomach wound was, he said, a mass of white maggots.

I asked him what he had done about it afterwards. One of the other wounded men, a corporal, told me that two days later they thought they could still see some movement! At last one of their own officers had told off three good shots to put a volley into the sufferer. *Sunt lachrymae rerum.*

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Only once—it was near Dranoutre in October, 1914—did I see one of our men undergoing First Field punishment. Arms and legs extended crucifix fashion, a sorry object, he was lashed with wrists and ankles to a spare wheel that leant against the roadside hedge. This mediæval and rather barbarous form of punishment aroused the pity, not to say the indignation, of the French peasantry; it was their excited comments underneath the windows of our billet that first drew my attention. I went out and examined the crucified one: the cords round his wrists and ankles had certainly been tied very tight, and his heart was beating irregularly. Probably, he was not much the worse for his punishment, but I recommended that he should be released. The little group of French peasants, old men, women and children who had been watching this 'crucifixion', as they called it, gradually dissolved, but not without passing some uncomplimentary remarks concerning the resemblances between German and British officers in the exercise of authority over their men.

G. M. Trevelyan in his *British History of the Nineteenth Century*, notes that in a previous campaign in Flanders, in which some of our grandfathers took part, cruel punishments of the men for drunkenness and other misbehaviour were often ordered by our officers. He quotes General Sir Robert Wilson: 'The halberds were regularly erected along the lines every morning for floggings, and the shrieks of the sufferers made a pandemonium from which the foreigner flew with terror and astonishment at the severity of our military rule.' In this particular form of cruelty the English Army held a bad pre-eminence in Europe. It was odd that after more than a century medical authority was needed to shorten another stupid and rather impolitic exhibitions of 'English discipline' in Flanders. Our English leopard changes his

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spots very slowly, our upper classes being still wedded to flogging and other mediæval traditions. We worship the cruel, credulous and insanitary Middle Ages—the ages of Faith, Dirt, Syphilis and Petticoats!

CHAPTER XIV

WE BEGIN—THE HUNDRED BATTLES OF YPRES AND THE YSER SWAMPS

The 8th of October, 1914; a grim, bleak afternoon, a chill north-east wind. Beneath grey skies the Cavalry Division streams north along the broad, paved main road that runs through Amiens.

Cold and thoroughly bored in the ranks, I caught sight of a spire and minarets and found my way through narrow streets to the Cathedral, tethering my horse to some iron railings near a small door on the south side. After the ruin at Rheims it was reassuring to see this great masterpiece still intact.

Outside on that gloomy afternoon was war and waste, confusion and suffering; and inside was gloom also, but of a different quality. In the silence of the Cathedral many women in deepest mourning knelt and prayed. It was so dark it was scarcely possible to see their figures—just the bent forms, and in the gloom their whispering voices and the faint smell of incense. There was something familiar in this scene. Years before, in India, I remembered entering a great temple where Indian women prayed and wept because their firstborn had been taken from them. There was famine in the land, and all around those they loved best were suffering the slow agony of starvation or the horrors of plague or cholera.

And now, here in Europe, those same bent forms, like shadows in an Aeschylean tragedy; those same mute

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figures faced with sorrow, inscrutable destiny, inevitable suffering. The gloom of the great Indian temple and of Amiens Cathedral was the same. The same crouching figures bent before a symbol of Life, the Trident of Shiva or the Cross of Christ. In an atmosphere of grief and suppliant perplexity, the same shadowed eyes and whispered words of prayer.

That night we billeted in Villers Bocage. The next time I was to enter Amiens Cathedral it was to be filled not with wives and daughters, but with an even greater throng of widows and orphans—no longer suppliant but resigned.

The Germans were pressing rapidly towards the coast; Boulogne, we heard, had been already abandoned in panic! So we raced on north through chill October days on the long dreary *pavé* roads with their endless lines of poplars, the leaves shrivelling in the cold wind. Presently we were near Estaire in drizzle and darkness, a cold rank fog shrouding the Forest of Nieppe.

The Germans were already there and in force, right and left of us. Scarcely had we entered these woods when some horsemen dashed across our front amidst the trees.

Quick challenges rang out in the fog, as our men fired—fired at close range into a troop of the 9th Lancers!

I stayed with one whom we carried into a shabby little two-roomed lodge in the forest. He was shot through the right lung and deep in the armpit. We lit a candle, and I made fruitless efforts to stop the bleeding. We propped him up on the grimy bunk and gave him sips of water at intervals. In half an hour he was dead.

We spent the best part of a wretched night staggering and slipping about in the fog amidst stumps of trees and brambles. The deep slimy mud of the rides through the woods had already been ploughed up into a bog by German cavalry. At last we got through to the more open

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country on the far side. About 3 a.m. we lay down to get a little rest in a cottage. I went to sleep on some very grimy potato sacks beneath a kitchen table. An old dame full of pity for us all, came and tenderly piled fresh potato sacks over me to keep me warm. Suddenly a messenger from the Lancers awoke me; there had been apparently several clashes with the enemy on the fringes of the wood and the 9th had had a number of casualties. Owing to the extent to which their squadrons were spread out, they could not find their own doctor in the fog, so I must go at once. The C.O. asleep in a chair with his head on the kitchen table, woke up and grumbled. We were good friends with the 9th, it was on my account that he grumbled.

It was bitterly cold as my guide, a corporal of the 9th, and I, tried to find our way through the fog, now faintly lit up by the moon, to the point at which he imagined he had left the wounded officers and men of his troop. Many times we lost the way, for the wood had a zigzag outline, and the Germans were still in possession of certain parts of it. So we were challenged every fifty yards or so, and more than once fired at; a fog in a wood at night, partly occupied by the enemy, makes everyone jumpy. Wounds were ghastly because, in the fog, fire was often at such close range. At last we stumbled on to the Headquarters of the squadron we looked for; the ride had been barricaded with logs to prevent it being rushed in the night. I remember vaguely that Basil Blackwood, Benson, and Reynolds were there, also others who were wounded. Sebag Montefiore, whose brother in the Horse Gunners I had met years before, had been shot at point-blank range in the fog by a German only four or five yards from him and had a ghastly wound in his right arm. The whole forearm was pulped, his hand hanging by a shred, the bones splintered to fragments. They had carried him on

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to an exceedingly grimy bed in a miserable little woodman's hut near Le Cornet Perdu. I tried by the light of a stump of a candle to do something for him. He stood the handling heroically.

'My right arm!' he said resentfully. 'I shall never be able to play polo again. Can you save my hand?'

As luck would have it, the shred by which his hand hung contained one of the principal arteries to the hand—apparently undamaged

'I think so, and you may have a useful arm.'

'How?'

'Well, if you don't mind the idea, they can perhaps put in rabbits' bones in place of your own which have been splintered.'

'Oh, I don't mind what they do so long as you can save my hand; then I shan't be so helpless.'

I made a trough splint for his arm with some cardboard I found in the hut, and he was taken away looking comparatively cheerful. Afterwards he wrote to tell me that not only was his arm saved but that he could hold a fork or a pipe in the hand.

During that night our Colonel had become a Brigadier, and De Lisle a Divisional Commander of the 'First' Cavalry Division. Further cavalry were on their way to us, so Allenby was now to be the Commander of a Cavalry Corps. We were all glad to have our own Colonel as General. 'Dick' Mullens had had the reputation of being one of the cleverest at Eton. He seemed always as cool as a cucumber and, from a military point of view, as far as I could judge, as cute as a hatful of monkeys. He was, as well, extremely kind and good humoured; and best of all, with all his cleverness, as straight as a die. Frankness and sincerity are the hall-mark of a really capable and confident man—soldier or otherwise. Sometimes he would profess to be indignant and re-

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proachful, but there seemed never to be any real sting when he rebuked someone—only a friendly tone of ‘My dear boy, you know you can be quite intelligent when you like. Please don’t be *quite* such a bloody fool.’ It always sounded more like an amused undercurrent than a reprimand. He did not lose all sense of proportion and sincerity in haste for kudos, decorations, and promotion.

It was a raw cold morning the day he assumed command of the Brigade. A dense white mist still covered the countryside. Charles Romer Williams, shaking with cold, borrowed my British Warm overcoat. Two minutes afterwards Charles, impetuously brave, rode at full gallop into a group of Germans at La Couronne cross-roads near Vieux Berguin. He was wearing a dark blue silk scarf, had not shaved for days, and my overcoat, much too small for him, was slung on his shoulder like the jacket of a Hungarian Hussar. The Germans—there were five of them—astonished I suppose at his very sudden and bizarre appearance, all fired at him point blank, and missed! One bullet knocked his cap off. Charles dashed back full of excitement. Evidently he was not to be trusted with my overcoat! Ramsay, another of our subalterns, was wounded and captured a moment later; his riderless horse, with a bullet sticking in the saddle, came dashing back to us.

At Strazeele railway crossing we bumped into some more German cavalry. Two of them, whose horses had been shot as they galloped across the railway lines, had broken legs and one a broken thigh. I splinted them with pieces of wood from the paling near the station. We had previously come up against this regiment, of which Queen Victoria had been Honorary Colonel, at Moncel; again I cut off some of the shoulder straps of the wounded men with her cipher ‘V.R.I.’ worked in black silk on the grey cloth, but like Karl von Waldo’s sword and the

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black and white pennons I had taken from the lances of dead Uhlans, I soon threw them away.

As we finished dressing a number of wounded men in the street of Vieux Berguin, two lightly wounded men who had bandaged one another had stopped and were staring up at the crucifix at La Couronne crossroads. The plaster face of the tortured Christ up on the cross was cracked and chipped with bullets, perhaps some of those that had missed Charles early that morning.

'Christ! He ain't much mucking use out here, is he, Bill?'

I did not hear his friend's reply, but the remark bluntly expressed what many perhaps were thinking on that Sunday morning. Just beyond Strazeele level crossing the Germans had stopped retreating. One of our batteries of Horse Artillery, on the high ground to the right close to Merris, had been fairly heavily shelled and machine-gunned. I rode up to see if they had any wounded. It was pretty hot in the little hamlet of Merris, and we dragged or carried the wounded gunners and signallers into an Estaminet at a corner on the left. One man by some extraordinary freak had got nearly every finger of both hands shattered, besides a wound in his leg. We had barely got him and the other wounded inside the Estaminet before clouds of smoke and shouts warned us that the inn was on fire. Scarcely had we got them out again into the street when the Germans apparently got a direct hit on to one of our limbers. In the meantime, one or two of the other houses had taken fire and riderless horses were galloping about. I was shouting to some of the slightly wounded to come and help to carry the helpless ones under cover, when a quiet voice beside me said reprovingly:

'Isn't this damned old war noisy enough without your shouting like that?'

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I turned round; it was Meyricke. He had once been a Horse Gunner and was now again in the Field Artillery.

'I wish when people go to war they would not all be so noisy about it,' he drawled, shaking me by the shoulders.

Meyricke helped us to carry the helpless ones into a yard, and when I had finished giving directions about them, he was still waiting for me, smoking a cigarette and unconcernedly watching the three houses that were now alight in the village.

'You're a nice one to talk about noise,' I said. 'If it wasn't for you confounded gunners with your noisy pop-guns setting everything alight, we might have had quite a gentlemanly war.'

He examined my face with disgust.

'Good God, what a disgusting sight! You haven't shaved for weeks!'

'Shave! Of course I haven't shaved! Naturally, you with your battery going about a mile a day with an infantry division, stopping of course at every château, bathing your rosy limbs in the fountains in the park, and sleeping every night with all the spare marchionesses you find lying about—and with a spare limber to carry your commode. . . . Shave, indeed! You might bring a little *pâté de foie gras* and some caviare next time you come. What are you doing, anyway, up here away from your Division?'

'Oh, our General's got cold feet. The Division are down in Pradelles; and my battery is doing nothing as usual, and doing it very nicely, thank you! So I thought I'd just come up here and see if it was St. Clair's Battery, and what they were making such a noise about. Have a cigarette. Where are all your wonderful field ambulances?'

'God knows! I don't seem to have seen a medical unit for weeks; but I just dress any wounded I find and tie bits

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of white bandage on trees, farm gates and door handles, and hope for the best.'

'You are evidently trusting in God!'

'Yes.'

'Don't, my dear boy. Never do anything so rash. He will certainly let you down. God,' he said, lighting a cigarette, 'is now on combined-leave (Anglo-Indian slang for prolonged absence). But it's rather unnecessary for you to get so excited because a few houses are on fire.'

'Unnecessary! I can't get any of your wonderful Horse Gunners to help me. They do nothing but run round picking up their empty cartridge cases; I was shouting because I wanted someone to help to shift all these wounded.'

'Shows how marvellously well trained gunners are; sticking to their drill when they've been firing with open sights.'

'Open sights! Was the Boche as near as that?'

'Of course, dear boy, and probably still is. Where are your eyes?'

I said that in that case I thought I ought to rejoin my regiment. Meyricke began to roar with laughter.

'You aren't trusting in God very *long*! If you only knew how funny you look with your beard! You ought to get your face up near enough for the Germans to see it, then they wouldn't be able to stop retreating this side of Potsdam. But I agree with you, I think the Boche is too near, and it's time we both went back to our *déjeuner à la fourchette*.'

That night I met him again in Pradelles. A brand-new infantry Division had arrived from somewhere by train. Meyricke, well mounted and with an amused smile on his face, was looking at a group of three men in a strange uniform, standing by the door of Pradelles church.

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'Who on earth are they?' I asked.

'Army chaplains.'

'Army chaplains!' They were the first I had seen since we landed in France, their uniform was new to me. One had large spectacles and looked a little lost. 'Aren't they rather far up—what on earth are they doing up here?'

'My dear old boy, don't be so obtuse! Naturally they have come up here to pray to the Lord Jesus Christ to help us to *kill more Germans!*'

CHAPTER XV

'PLUGSTREET' WOOD IN 1914

North and east of us the Germans were still falling back. We billeted at Fletre, where I heard details from Kentish of a bayonet charge by a company of his regiment, the Staffords—and some of the Seaforths. At dawn we rode northwards by St. Jean Capel, past Le Coq d'Or in heavy showers to the Belgian frontier at Mont Vidaigne, where for twenty-four hours we did little but reconnaissance. Then turning south again in a thick mist near Mont Rouge we passed through Locre and Neue Kirke (Neuve Eglise) to Ploegsteert. Le Bois de Ploegsteert we managed to hold, but here the German retirement stopped. Locked in stalemate, the two armies were destined to face and fight one another on the fringe of this famous wood for four years without the line shifting much more than the length of a cricket pitch.

At first we were optimistic, having forced the Germans back southward through Houplines clear of the suburbs of Armentières. But there was one house near Frelinghen from which we failed to dislodge a nest of machine-gunners. This house, carefully loopholed, commanded a bridge over the Lys, and it remained in German hands though on either side of it our line swung backwards and forward. It began to look as if it was to be a repetition of the stalemate on the Aisne. A day or two later German heavy artillery came into action, shelling the two ornate châteaux on the spur near Le Gheer in

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which the Headquarters of the Cavalry Division, now re-christened the First Cavalry Division, had rather too obviously taken up their abode.

Ploegsteert village was a dull spot, so I went forward with one of our squadrons which was pressing hard in front of Le Touquet to capture a bridge near Frelinghen. We got a fair number of casualties, one a newly joined officer, H. de G. Warter, who on his very first day in action had got a bullet clean through the centre of his neck without having any symptoms except a little stiffness. I was dressing his wound when I got a message to say I was to return at once to Regimental Headquarters in the inn at Ploegsteert. Doctors—some order said—were getting scarce, and regimental medical officers were to remain more at Headquarters and not risk getting captured. Rather a counsel of despair, especially for cavalry.

At Neuve Eglise we heard rumours concerning the misdoings of the departed German troops—numbers of young girls in the neighbourhood were said to have been raped, so Gal de Ledevéz our interpreter and myself as doctor were to investigate and confirm if possible for propaganda purposes. We had a long and rather entertaining hunt for the misused 'virgins', but found the complaining maidens were not so very virginal, our search ending in certain back lanes where the houses were adorned with *les grands numereux*, sufficiently indicative of the occupation of the bedizened little damsels congregated around the doors. They declared that the 'sal boches' who had just left had raped them all most brutally and repeatedly, but we found no signs of a struggle. In one room I noticed some money on the table which one of the young women very hastily endeavoured to hide from us. Certain corroborative evi-

dence was present, yet their underclothing was not torn, nor could I find any bruises on their wrists or any other sign of violence about their bodies. The tears that trickled from between well blacked eyelashes down the little painted cheeks of one or two of them might have been due to the young ladies having been really forced, or because some of the townsfolk gathered outside in the street had been vigorously scolding and threatening these girls for having had traffic with the enemy. We decided there was evidence enough for propaganda purposes and expressed our sympathy with the outraged damsels; Gal did this so feelingly to two of the youngest and prettiest that we both received quite pressing invitations to remain.

Amongst the fresh troops, mainly XII Infantry Brigade, who joined us at Plugstreet I heard some talk of medals and decorations. It happened that on the way from Fletre to the Belgian frontier I had been congratulated by Solly-Flood and Bridges because I was to receive some French decoration. Once I should have been pleasantly excited at the prospect; now it seemed rather childish and trivial giving one another bits of coloured ribbon to wear when perhaps the whole fate, not only of the British Empire, but of the rather queer confusion which we like to call our 'civilization', was trembling in the balance. Besides, decorations were certain later on to provoke jealousy and discontent; it was so often the windbag or the flat-catcher who got them.

Shortly before we had left the Aisne I had been ordered to report myself at the General's Headquarters near Vieil D'Arcy. My official superior, D., then acting as A.D.M.S. of the Cavalry Division, was to accompany me. The General, I had been told, rather disliked the R.A.M.C., and I supposed I was in for a wiggling about

something or other, perhaps for my insubordinate behaviour in daring to bring on the medical store-cart from Paris; also he was an extremely 'religious' man, disapproved of swearing and risqué stories, and strong on temperance, almost a teetotaler; in short, possessed all the classical ingredients of a martinet. Instead of giving me a wiggling the General was very complimentary. I had been sent for to be informed that I was to receive some special honour for something I had done, though I never heard what it was. He impressed upon me that what he was going 'to do' for me would make 'a great difference to my future career'. No feeling of modesty, real or affected, but a conviction that it was absurdly unjust to single me out, impelled me to demur, almost to argue the point. I thanked him, but insisted that practically every other officer in the regiment had been oftener exposed to danger and endured more hardship than I; in particular the young troop leaders, who with all their life before them risked so much, and whose actions had been so daring, much more deserved some recognition. The Brigadier did not seem to listen—D. said nothing. Anyway, the decoration didn't materialize. Shortly afterwards one of the troop leaders—Jones, I think—whose troop had gallantly captured a bridge over the Petit Morin, received the Legion of Honour or some other French decoration, which he certainly deserved. About this time the General began to insist on calling me 'Jones' and it was suggested that there had been some confusion. I doubt this—but in any case I soon forgot all about the decoration. As for my 'future career', I had made up my mind that either it would be speedily cut short for good and all in France, in which case pieces of coloured ribbon would not really make the slightest difference to me either in hell or in heaven; or else that as soon as this particular war was over and I got a chance,

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I would leave the Army and take up some ‘career’ in which ‘tin medals’ would be unimportant. In principle I don’t believe soldiers really approve of medals and decorations at all. We fought, or thought we fought, for our friends, for our homes, incomes, property, pensions and self-respect, and because we were pledged to fight and could not avoid it. I should have been an ass *not* to fight. If a man shows he is capable and dependable, then *promote* him; if he is not really capable, but merely impetuous and occasionally brave, the estimation of his fellows with whom he fights is quite sufficient reward. After all, some people have naturally good nerves, others not, and there can be no more necessity to tie pieces of metal and coloured ribbon on to a man’s coat to indicate he does his duty, or has once been brave, than to stick a label on his backside to say he pays his bills and doesn’t make too loud a noise when he eats.

A member of my mother’s family had distinguished himself at the naval engagement off the Scheldt when still little more than a boy, being specially promoted. He had continued to serve for many years in our campaigns against France. When he had retired from the Navy some twenty-five years and was busy with his orchard and his garden in Cornwall, some pompous ass at the Admiralty sent him a condescending, patronizing sort of letter and a medal with a piece of coloured ribbon—the first and only medal or decoration that the old man ever had. Old enough then not to care a damn for anyone, he wrote a scornful letter to their lordships at the Admiralty, thanking them for the medal and asking them what on earth he was expected to do with it!

We used to jeer at foreign nations for their ribbon-hunting obsessions. Mr. George Graves as the Crown Prince of ‘Ruritania’ would appear beaming and resplen-

dent on the London musical comedy stage with about fifteen blazing Orders of the Bath, the Crown, the White Elephant, and other whatnots on his coat or tied round his neck; in those days this medal business merely amused an English audience. But now our own generals and even some of their youngest A.D.C.'s with their rainbow breastplates of coloured gew-gaws and ribbons surpass even the Ruritaniens.

But when 'decorations' come your way, should you repudiate or discard them? Would you not then fall under suspicion of being a prig or a crank, highbrow and conceited? Would, for instance, a reluctant and none too affluent public buy more willingly a book by an author who described himself as 'has a bath daily and cleans his teeth after every meal' than by one who can tag on the usual list of C.M.G., D.S.O., or L.C.C., or O.B.E., or whatever other labels he may have obtained by luck, bluff, diplomacy or merit. Our medal-hanging competitions are rather imitated by the young man who, having been sent by socially ambitious parents to Eton or Oxford or into the Guards or something of that sort, feels it *always* necessary to wear an Old Etonian tie, or a Balliol blazer, or a Guards hat ribbon, in case some fool he may meet should fail to notice he was a snob.

Anyway, we were soon to be much too uncomfortable and preoccupied to think or care whether we or anyone else were decorated or undecorated. Nights in the mud, as some punster insisted, are quite as tiresome and unprofitable as Knights of the Garter.

Between Ypres and Armentières our scanty cavalry could not make any lasting push forward until we had more infantry support. By the time our infantry divisions had arrived, the Germans had consolidated their position, brought up artillery, and heavily outnumbered us. We

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not only could no longer move them; they began pressing hard upon us from the east and south. Soon Le Touquet was given up, and we were back in the village of Ploegsteert, trying to hold the eastern fringe of the wood and the hamlets of St. Yves and Le Gheer. The Inniskilling Fusiliers arrived and then departed, and the 9th Lancers had to fill up a big gap on our right; the 18th Hussars were also hauled into the line again and got a lot of casualties from the shelling in the wood. A day later, the Somerset Light Infantry came up on our right; on our left there often seemed to be no one between Le Gheer and St. Yves and beyond. The wood itself began to be fairly heavily bombarded; large branches and trees came crashing down, splinters flew in all directions, and our infantry were losing heavily. Wounded men stumbling back through the wood in the rain and darkness, many of them half-fainting, would drop their rifles or parts of their kit and accoutrements in the mud. Soon the muddy track through the woods became like a corduroy road almost paved with abandoned rifles, clips of cartridges, equipment, and broken boughs, trampled in by men and horses. Our Field and Horse batteries established in the wood just behind us were replying as best they could to the German howitzers, but they were terribly short of ammunition. The echoing roar of our shells, as they passed high over the trees still in leaf behind us, and the German shell-bursting, became incessant.

I had collected about fifty stretcher cases, including some Enniskillens and five of the Essex Regiment and several of the East Lancs. on the eastern fringe of the wood, behind a wooden shed that had a brick foundation about two feet high. There must have been German spies in the wood, for as soon as the scanty shelter behind this shed became also the regular rallying point for our

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infantry and dismounted cavalry, the Germans began to train their machine-guns on to it and to shell the wood all round. As the bullets at that range went through the wooden sides of the shed, we had to crouch to the level of the brickwork while dressing the wounded, several of whom got hit again after we had dressed them. For most of the time, though we were out of touch with field ambulances, some horse ambulance wagons came to the far side of the wood in the evenings and took away some of the stretcher cases. Numbers suffering from shock and exposure after being wounded lay many hours in the rain under both shell and rifle fire.

The wood, a jungle of muddy tracks obstructed by broken boughs, was becoming impassable; even the lightly wounded lost their way or found the deep mud and fallen trees a serious obstacle. No stretchers were to be had, so most of the wounded had to be dressed where they lay; the continual mislaying of our instruments when dressing the wounded was more irritating than the shelling; men and horses blundering past us trod everything into the mud. To be looking for a pair of scissors in a large damp wood that was being fairly heavily shelled seemed an absurdly trivial occupation for a sane man—armageddon too! It was no use cursing—everyone was doing that—as futile as complaining to Satan in hell that you had a cinder in your eye.

Early that morning I had crawled up into the grimy little attic in the roof of the hut we were using as a Mess and Headquarters. The place was a mass of cobwebs and full of lousy old sacks and baskets of very rotten little pears and apples. I lay down hoping to get some rest, but our Horse Gunners just outside were making too much noise. Then John Kirkwood, in spite of his sciatica came scrambling up the steep ladder with a rifle; with one foot on a rafter and the other on

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an apple box just above my head, he began having pot shots at the Germans through a hole he made in the roof by pushing away the tiles. The Enemy were a good four hundred yards away and I wondered whether, in the drizzle and mist, he was firing at individuals or just 'browning' them; and would they in return start shelling the hut just when our batman were trying to make us some tea.

On about the fourth or fifth day after our first attack on Frelinghen I was at Regimental Headquarters, which was now in the wood, with Dennis Darley and Solly Flood, when word came that Hornby was wounded and some sergeants and men of the 4th and a number of Somerset Light Infantry were all lying scattered about in the gardens of the little red brick villas that formed the hamlet of Le Gheer. These villas had been built either in pairs or in échelon to one another. Exposed now to fire from the flank as well as in front, the houses gave little or no protection. So to get out to Hornby and the others it was advisable to run in one of the ditches that ran on either side of the road and were full up with the constant rain; in this way at least the lower half of one's body was protected. The gateway of each villa had a miniature bridge over the ditch, making it necessary to keep on jumping up out of the ditch. It was in getting over one of these that I felt suddenly struck on the left thigh, as if with a strand of wire, the impact being sufficient to make me fall off the bridge into the ditch, which was half full of muddy water and old tins. Cursing heavily I ran on, feeling a bit lame from my fall. Someone running in the ditch behind had called out when I fell: 'You've stopped one!' but this was quite a common pleasantry when anyone stumbled.

I found Hornby rather badly wounded. One bullet had passed through the shoulder and neck, and another

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was lodged low down near the spine. He was lying in a trampled-down little garden in front of one of the villas within view and comparatively short range of the Germans, who seemed to be firing at us from St. Yves, though our Brigade Headquarters was supposed to be there.

Fortunately the drizzling rain made visibility poor, and, crouching down, it was possible to dress Hornby without drawing fire, but bullets were skipping about and knocking pieces of brick off the corners of the villa. The previous afternoon Hornby's horse had been knocked over by the concussion of a shell bursting near, and Darley and I had seen him flung to the ground. His back had been strained and bruised by this fall, and this made it difficult now to be sure how much of the pain he was now suffering was due to the bullet wounds. As soon as it was dusk, my corporal, a strong and gallant fellow, as brave as a lion, who had been attached to me on the Aisne, lifted two of the window shutters of the villa off their hooks and, propping them together, made a shelter for Hornby from the rain and bits of brick. There were several other wounded men lying about in the little gardens, and the two downstairs rooms of this villa were full of wounded men, both cavalry and infantry. Unfortunately, the back door and front doors of these villas were opposite one another, and down the little narrow passages between them bullets fired from our flank, which easily penetrated the doors, were hopping and pinging, so we had to scramble in and out of the rooms through the windows and keep crouched down below the window sill. Wounded men were ranged round the walls. My back was aching with so much crawling and crouching, and I was soaked. Other infantry wounded had got into the villas on the opposite side of the road. Dodging across the road to visit them kept one from getting too chilled and stiff.

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More wounded, including some of the East Lancshires, were being carried in from the road to the garden, which got occasionally sprayed with machine-gun bullets that came through the narrow slanting intervals not more than three or four feet wide between this villa and the one next to us on the German side, which was much nearer the road. One lad of the Somerset Light Infantry who lay in one of the little gardens had got a shell wound in the lower part of the body; it was a particularly nasty wound, exposing the interior of his belly. There was now a steady drizzle, and I was some time trying to cover up his wound with dressings. Even if we had had stretchers, moving him would have been out of the question. To dress the wound it was necessary occasionally to lift the lower part of his body an inch or two from the ground, and this, in spite of morphia, gave him the most terrible pain. It was growing dark as I finished. He was wet through and terribly chilled, but I had got the wound well covered up and was spreading a ground sheet over him to keep the rain off, when he gave a sudden start. I was afraid I must have pressed too hard on the wound, and spoke to him. He did not answer; his moaning had stopped, and I thought he had fainted. Turning my torch to his face I saw that the back of his head had been torn away and part of the damaged brain was protruding on to the muddy grass. A bullet ricocheting from the corner of the house about ten feet away must have struck the back of his skull sideways just as I finished dressing him, and so what I had done had been useless.

During a lull Hornby was got away, but later the firing increased and we were cut off from the remainder of the Regiment. That night the stream of machine-gun bullets, coming across as well as down the street, and the shelling and the lack of stretchers, made removal of the

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wounded practically impossible. The darkness and drizzling rain was lit up almost continuously by the flash of bursting shell and blazing hayricks. Without food or drink, we were most of us fed up and deadly weary. I was beginning to get chilled and had a splitting headache. An old graze on the knee which I had got when we crashed at Le Plessis was beginning to ache again. From a peculiar giddiness that always comes on with fever I suspected that I had a temperature. I could no longer think very clearly and began to feel as if all my strength had gone.

In one of the cottages, about midnight, Sergeant Wright of the 4th, who was wounded in the arm, lit a candle and I had a look at my knee, discovering that I had also a superficial wound near the hip. I could see the tendon of muscles at the bottom of the wound, which was full of grit. Later on I took my temperature and found it was 103. I was puzzled by this sudden rise; it certainly could not have been the flesh wound in my thigh, which was quite painless and numb.

Later on, after 3 a.m., it got quieter. I do not know why we did not all make our escape from those isolated villas and get back to our food and the Regiment now holding the fringe of the wood. But no one realized exactly what the general position was. As a message had come to say that someone was being sent with food, we supposed from this that it was still hoped to hold the whole village and we were to remain where we were. But the food never came; possibly the man bringing it got hit. As I had been acting as mess secretary I might myself have sent an order back, but fever and wretchedness had made me lose interest. I felt irritable and had barely the strength to go on dressing the wounded that got into the villas or lay about in the gardens, most of them now men of the Somersets. I

think their doctor must have been hit at the beginning of the week, for they had kept on coming to me on previous days about men who were lying badly wounded out beyond the hedges in the fields around. The indication of position was always more than vague. When after much trouble I got out to one or two of them, I saw from the nature of the wound that they must have died a moment or two after being hit, or else the wounded man had been already bandaged up and had got back to the villas. At last, sick of these wild-goose chases, I kicked. 'I can't go out', I told them, 'to look for these cases unless you know they are bleeding seriously or in great pain. They must either be carried in here, or else you must send an N.C.O. with me who really knows *exactly* where they are.' The mist and rain not only diminished visibility but made vague directions sound still more vague.

'Carried! Out there!' It was a young subaltern of the Somersets speaking. 'How the devil can they be carried! No one dare show even his head out there! And I certainly can't spare another N.C.O. to go out with you.'

'Then how the hell am I to get out?'

'Oh, but you're a doctor and protected by the Red Cross! Of course they won't hurt *you*!'

'What!' I was wet through and feeling irritable. 'Do you suppose that the machine-gun bullets will obligingly divide themselves into two streams so that I can pass between. Besides, you have your own doctor, and your men are Regulars all trained to first aid and to use their First Field dressings. Of course, if you can't find your doctor, I'll try to go out to some of the worst cases; but I have my own regiment to look after. As it is, these houses here are full of your wounded whom we are dressing, and others as well. I can't do everything. Besides, where *is* your own doctor?'

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He said he didn't know and looked scornful and depressed. Evidently he thought I was a rotten doctor and a very bad-tempered one. He walked away from me round the corner of the house and was shot in the head almost as he turned the corner. Thinking he was only unconscious, two of his own men lifted him back into the garden, but he was quite dead. He did not look more than about eighteen.

I was afterwards told that the man this poor boy was so upset about was his own platoon sergeant, who had been shot in the head and had lived but a few minutes after being hit.

The next evening we got back to the shed near the wood which now did duty for Regimental Headquarters. Solly was there directing operations—he now commanded the Regiment. He was kind and good-tempered as usual and put out that we had had no food. Our French interpreter, acting in my absence as mess secretary, had sent out the previous day a basket of food and wine for us, but no one knew what had happened to it. In the wood near our Headquarters I found several wounded men of the Essex and East Lancashires and three officers of the 18th Hussars, including Houldsworth wounded in the arm, Thackwell in the shoulder, and Gore-Langton with a head wound. Houldsworth, a complete stranger to me, was, I found out later, a distant cousin. Thackwell, who was severely wounded, wrote to me afterwards to say he was recovering.

The slight wound gave me no pain; but I felt strangely dizzy and had a most consuming thirst. That afternoon the fighting got more intense. They were now shelling the wood continuously and all around us as it grew dark blazed a fierce crackle of rifle-fire. So intense was the fire that it lit up the sky to a dull glow on both sides, especially towards Messines and Ypres. At last after many

delays, we handed over to some infantry, and marched away in rain and darkness through the woods towards Wulverghem and Wytschaete.

In Wulverghem I found an attic and lay down feeling utterly wretched. My watch had stopped; probably it was about 3 a.m. I do not know how long I slept, but it must have been afternoon when I looked out of the window. It was dreary, wet, and windy. Indian Cavalry, all hunched up with the cold, were halted in the street below, their brown faces looking sallow and pinched in the chill grey light. My temperature was still between 103 and 104. Presently my corporal came in. He had good news—the Regiment was going into reserve, Indian Cavalry were relieving us. I told him to keep up with the Regiment and tell them where I was and look after anyone who was sick, and not to say there was anything the matter with me. If we went into action again, he was to come back with my horse.

I was annoyed with myself for getting ill. If I left the Regiment on account of a slight wound and fever, I should probably never get back to them, for I was already rather too senior for regimental work, a duty usually reserved for the most junior R.A.M.C. officers. Besides, Phipps-Hornby, Wright, Featherstonhaugh and half a dozen other officers in the Brigade had been wounded during the past week, and none of them had thought of leaving the field, and a regimental doctor, of all people, should be the last to make a fuss about a scratch. But if I mentioned my wound and fever to another doctor I should certainly get sent back, and when convalescent probably be detailed for some dull duty at a base hospital, where I should loathe the comparative inaction and routine. I hated bridge parties; mild flirtations with nursing Sisters did not appeal; yet, on the other hand I was almost useless as I was, and felt

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myself getting more so hour by hour.

I must have slept again. Later my corporal came back and, I suppose, saw I was ill. That day or the next, Cowie, a Major in the R.A.M.C., came to see me. By that time I was getting cramp in the muscles of my stomach and legs; one side of my face felt quite stiff and numb as if I'd had a blow, and I began to wonder whether the scratches I had got at Paissy and Le Plessis weeks before could have got poisoned or infected with the tetanus germ of lockjaw. Cowie took my temperature: it was still about 103. I told him I had got a slight graze on the hip. He looked at it and said I must be reported as wounded. I forgot to mention the old grazes which were probably the real cause of the trouble, but he came back in a few moments and gave me a big dose of anti-tetanus serum and told me he would send an ambulance for me. Possibly he didn't mark the injection he gave me on the wound label, or it may have got rubbed off. Anyway, I seemed to get hypodermic doses of serum or morphia or something or other nearly every time we stopped. I had lost all interest in proceedings that now became a succession of nightmare journeys in jolting ambulances. I was laid on the floor for an hour or two in overcrowded casualty clearing stations at Bailleul and Hazebrouck; then I was in an improvised ambulance train of second-class P.L.M. carriages, getting more and still more doses of anti-tetanus serum.

The journey in the train was simply ghastly and seemed endless. The jolting was so bad that both I and a subaltern who was lying on the seat opposite me, his knee joint badly shattered, were twice jerked off on to the floor. Each time he lay and screamed with pain. He must have endured agony. It seemed ages before worn-out, pale-faced orderlies arrived to lift us back again. Then we were on a boat—the *St. Andrew* or the *St.*

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David from I don't know where, either Boulogne or Havre, and seemed to be a terribly long time at sea. I had then the one and only dream I have ever had of the War, if it was of the War. An absurd, meaningless dream that my mouth kept filling with blood, while a ridiculous little wooden ship, a toy worked by strings like a marionette, moved in deadly and threatening circles above my head. The hospital ship was rolling heavily as I awoke, and my mouth *was* full of blood and every joint and nerve in my body was on fire. I suppose this may have been partly due to large overdoses of anti-tetanus serum. The ship creaked, the wounded on the beds and bunks all round groaned and complained. I dozed, then an agonized scream from someone whose wounds were being dressed woke me up again. Then we were in a shed at Southampton in the biting frosty air of the last days of October. Someone I could not recognize was bending down over the stretcher, telling me that I had been mentioned in Sir John French's first dispatch—and the first spell of my second war was finished.

PART II

CHAPTER XVI

REACTION

What happens to our minds—our souls, if one must use that rather question-begging term—matters so much more than that which happens to our bodies. Every unhappy face we pass in English streets, over-anxious, ill-tempered, strained, or just dull and conceited, should hammer this into our heads. We punish certain forms of physical cruelty but almost ignore the causes of mental suffering, the bullying and loneliness that can be so much more soul-destroying.

Ought one to include in an account of the War the effects it had upon one's mind, the change it brought about in one's opinions on social and political and religious matters? Does it not smack too much of introspective autobiography? Yet every complete account which we give to others of even a single event in our lives must inevitably disclose much of our own character. It is difficult to avoid being autobiographical in describing some of the most strenuous and tragic series of incidents, extending for months and years, through which one had passed. Those who are frank about their own thoughts often become, in England, a target for cheap scorn. We English make rather a speciality of concealment: it is considered rash, indiscreet, tactless, to be frank. Do not the Franks live on the other side of our Channell

As I lay recovering from the strain in Netley Hospital,

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I felt changed in some way not easy to define. Mentally, I felt a different person from what I had been but twelve short weeks before. In all the years of war and peace that have come since, this sense of change has never quite left me. I discovered that many others felt this change in themselves—and were puzzled by it.

Perhaps it was because amongst other things one's historical background was gone. War and history now fell into a new perspective. The Wars of the Roses, the Civil War, and the later wars that ended with Camperdown and Trafalgar—campaigns in which my ancestors had taken part—my father's adventures which had ended at Sebastopol, and my own first essay in war which had ended at the capture of Johannesburg, seemed now all to have been mere trivial sordid brawls—as indeed, from some points of view, perhaps they were. Carlyle's heroes, and even Virgil's and Homer's—those boastful, hectoring, swaggering village champions of Troy—even they seemed to have dwindled; and all moral values were now seen in a different perspective. I was beginning to be intolerant of things I had previously looked upon as necessary evils. Our minds and souls, we are told, either atrophy or grow. This feeling of change might be growth or atrophy; either birth pains, the beginnings of a wider outlook, or a creeping paralysis.

Someone of whom I had been very fond, and was, I think, beginning to be fond of me (certainly she had written regularly and her letters had seemed very precious in the first few weeks of the War) came to see me as I lay in hospital at Netley. Literally we stared at one another as if we had been strangers! Neither of us could find a word to say, or knew any urge to express emotion in a kiss, scarcely even in the pressure of the hand.

'What is it?' asked a strange feminine voice. 'You look so different, so changed!' And then, looking at the

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other wounded officers on either side, and gently trying to make excuses: 'Of course, you have all been through such a lot. You look dreadfully ill.'

And yet, I think, her womanly instinct told her that something more than mere illness and fatigue and strain had marked itself on all of us. There was a change of spirit, of vision, of feeling.

Later, convalescent, in conversation with other wounded officers, it slipped out that they too felt changed. Their first meetings with wife, fiancée, sister and mother, had left a curious sense of emptiness, of strangeness and disappointment!

The friend who had come to see me was by all English standards very beautiful. I had been congratulated—thought lucky—before the War, in having anyone so charming to go about with. I am sure that she was as kind, as gentle, and as sincere as any other English-woman; but—and the queer thing is, and I found other people had the same impression—there seemed now something mechanical, almost hard and metallic about the beauty of the women of England. Their manner seemed so bright, clear and cheerful—dreadfully cheerful. To strained nerves, and I suppose ours were strained, their cheerfulness was almost repellent.

These girls, fresh complexioned and clear eyed, who came breezily from tennis courts and links to welcome us, and who could make heroes of us, seemed—just as our own so-called 'heroism' seemed—unreal. Their life, the whole life of the England to which we had returned—the country house, club, and dinner party England—seemed rather paltry, meaningless, almost small-motived. Women came to our bedsides, old friends, and taking our hands stroked them and sought to please us by abusing the Germans. Abused the men who, like us, endured all things; endured even more perhaps than we had!

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Abused those who fought, or at any rate believed they fought, for their country, their mothers, homes, and children amidst the blood and mud, the filth and agony of Flanders.

Who were these trim females, fresh from their comfortable homes, their well-spread dinner tables and spotless bathrooms, who were they to pour venomous abuse upon Germans or anyone else who endured so much vile-ness over there? One looked out of the tall hospital win-dows southwards over the yellowing lines of poplars—over there across that grey sleeve of troubled water that stretched betwixt comfortable peace on this side of the Channel and an inferno of suffering beyond. I know that all this sounds unfair, but unreasonable though it may be, that was the reaction.

One would make some excuse for withdrawing one's hand and try to change the subject. So it was always throughout this war—like other wars. The further people were away from the enemy—Boers or Germans, or Pathans or Chinese or Turks—the more venomous their abuse, the more uncontrolled their passion, the more vindictive their hatred and lust for blood.

In the hospital we read how women and even the clergy had begun to sneer at and incite hatred against the conscientious objector; to jeer at any young man not in uniform. Overgrown schoolgirls and young women were beginning to talk of white feathers, to offer insults to boys in their teens who showed no haste to go out to France to kill their fellow men. Patriotic? Perhaps! Yet. . . This approval that men should fight and destroy one another as if in protection of females. . . Well—somehow it was unattractive. It was more a feeling than a reasoned process. The Church and women—the two influences we had once supposed made for gentleness and forgiveness—seemed to be turning out quite otherwise.

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Hero worship! Those who came back wounded at the beginning got more than enough of that. But *were* we heroes? I think very few of us had any illusions on that score.

I had already seen plenty of dead and dying Germans, their bodies torn with bullets, sword, or lance, or completely shattered by shell. If we were heroes, were they not more than heroes, being up against such odds, in arms against a whole world? We would lie on our beds and read fulsome paragraphs about ourselves, 'the Regulars', and foaming, venomous and spiteful abuse of the 'vile Germans' in the English newspapers. What were we really? The women in neutral countries might perhaps think of us Regulars as experts; as a great band of trained and uniformed butchers, home for a breather from our blood bath! True, I was a doctor; but it is a military doctor's duty in war as in peace to keep men fit, to bind up their wounds, and to keep on patching them up so that they shall be fit to kill, and kill, and kill again! Army doctors cannot shelter themselves in war under the wing of their civil profession from their true responsibility. It would be insincere to pretend I was not an auxiliary, an accessory to all this killing. War was like a malignant form of scarlet fever, a disease; and I was but repairing or preparing with my efforts and scientific knowledge the cannon-fodder, the raw material of war.

We used to throw down the newspapers, nauseated with the praise of the 'Regulars'—adulation almost as fulsome as the beslaving of Queen Victoria in 1897, that Jubilee riot of snobbishness and servility that would have palled even on a Roman Emperor or a Babylonian overlord.

As a Regular soldier who had enjoyed for years the pay and privileges and the generous leave of the Regular Army, who had been permitted—'commanded'—at pub-

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lic expense to travel up to levées at St. James's Palace, attending in a gold-laced uniform rather meaningless and expensive functions which counted as a whole day's work on full pay, I felt I had had an easy time. As one whose pension rights, without any cost to oneself, accumulated automatically with every day's service as a serving soldier, I had had in any case no choice but to go and do my best. I, like other 'Regulars', had not only no option concerning my part in the War, but was only being tardily called upon to do in 1914 what I had promised to do, been paid to do, and been waiting to do, ever since 1902. It would not only have been shameful cowardice, it would have been a despicable fraud, a breach of contract, to have in any way attempted to get to the Base, or to evade fulfilment to the very utmost of such a long-standing and well-rewarded contract.

Yet, throughout the War, because of our English tendency to insincerity and snobbishness, and our contempt for consistency and logic, the Regular officer was usually made much of, and the temporary officer rather disparaged or despised.

Now, even for us Regulars who knew the regulations and all the ropes, who had been prepared by long years of training for the danger and vicissitudes of war, the strain was severe, sometimes terrible. But for these temporary officers—civilian youngsters pulled from field and shop and office, from banks and country manors and universities, and flung with but perfunctory training, or none, straight into the furnace—it must have been more than doubly dreadful. For them, too, there was little or no hope of adequate pension if they lost a limb or an eye, or their nerves were wrecked by the strain, or their business ruined in their absence. They had perforce, because they were not Regulars, to take the more subordinate and so nearly always the more exposed positions. There was not

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only for them less chance of survival, but there could be little hope, when they left their homes, of a permanent military career when the peace came. For most of them, prematurely aged in body and mind by the strain of war, there waited if they survived only the practical certainty of a disorganized business, a wrecked civil profession, and perhaps an estranged wife. Led by *Punch* and the more snobbish part of the Press, these gallant men who risked all and got little or nothing—some of the real heroes of the War—were mimicked and ridiculed as the ‘temporary gentlemen’! And the women in particular had joined the press-snobs in this shameful mockery. ‘Patriotism’ for such folk as these, as Nurse Cavell had to say afterwards, was indeed ‘not enough!’ One must have been at one of the more expensive Public Schools, have an ‘Oxford’ accent or be a ‘Regular’ to have one’s patriotism considered the genuine article. We had returned from the Boer War to be fêted in our villages, and I, certainly in this war, had had already more than my share of kudos; though in many ways I had really suffered less than most. My wound was trivial, the fever was subsiding, I slept well and my nerves were unaffected—at least I supposed them to be.

We all of us show or conceal our fear and our ‘nerves’ in different ways—one reason at least why a punishment for fear and its specific reaction in the individual concerned is so iniquitous. Neither in the South African nor in the Great War, nor afterwards in the Irish Rebellion, did I ever fail to fall asleep soundly and almost dreamlessly when my head touched the pillow. My appetite was always excellent and even when I was really cold-footed—in actual fear—when sometimes with scarcely any head cover, we were being heavily bombarded, the tin mug of tea in my hand never trembled, although I knew I was as much frightened as anyone else present. I had

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begun to enjoy being frightened. The rolling thunder of heavy gunfire, like the sound of real thunder or of ocean breakers, is to me very stimulating. When we were any distance back from the front line it always felt so dull. Possibly in my own case early associations helped. Cocked hats, epaulettes, swords and medals, lurid battle pictures and battle stories were very familiar to us as children, we were almost brought up on them. One does not suppose the urge to be 'in the show' was either patriotism or unselfishness. It was probably due as much as anything to hereditary love of movement, excitement and adventure; or else just ambition and egoism. It is as easy to gain an undeserved reputation for 'patriotism' if you like adventure as it is a reputation for coolness if you are rather given to fussing about details when all kinds of large and noisy events happen to be taking place nearby.

The change in the mind of the returned soldier showed itself, I think, at first in a growing aloofness, almost a disapproval of the conventions, a contempt for snobbish separation of the classes that was accepted, even found acceptable, before the War. Many felt impatient with the bungling, irrational, venomous abuse, with the untruthful propaganda poured out against our 'enemies', who were in the main so obviously brave, humane, orderly, cleanly and extraordinarily competent, if rather too sentimental—as witness the carol singing and the friendliness of those German lads upon whom, and our own men as well, we had so ruthlessly turned our guns on the first Christmas Eve of the War. We considered this fraternization as 'uncalled for' and bad for the 'war spirit'.

There was I think a change in our estimate of women and in our outlook on sex. In the presence of such abundant and almost purposeless death, the conventional

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'mystery' of sex (it is surely no mystery at all) seemed trivial.

Men cannot go through months of war without beginning to feel an even greater contempt for Life than they acquire for Death. And women, because they are so specially associated with sex, for the most part so evidently devoted to making the most of it as a temptation or a trap, so specially responsible for Life, so prone to overestimate the moral value of physical courage and success, so instinctively admirers of the warlike, the combative and the materially 'successful', became to some extent involved in the contempt for Life itself.

Our former respect for the human society centering around the woman and the home was disturbed. Our 'patriotic' belief in the tribe with its tribal jealousies and officiating priests, which could approve and excuse and even exult in these gigantic murder competitions, blood-lusts urged by commercial rivalry, tribal greed and racial ambition, was shaken. Why was it so seldom the women or the chaplains or priests who urged an armistice? Are men away from women more merciful, less combative, less vindictive? "The nearer the Church and the priests—and sometimes perhaps women—the further from God."

Contradictory as it may seem, many home from the Front became more immoral and incontinent than before. They wanted a last fling at life before a second dose of the shambles. It was a desire, a genetic, a racial urge, dictated by stress, by the very imminence and likelihood of extinction, by circumstances and instincts. The soldier at the Base and the soldier on leave certainly drank and womanized more than he had usually done before. But it was the frank and giddy powdered young females who, when we returned, met us in fashionable restaurants, humble pubs or at select dances, roused the physical appetite. Morally they seemed suddenly to have sunk below

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men; below even those verminous and foul-mouthed troglodytes whom we had left burrowing and huddled amidst the mud-banks and sandbags of the Yser Canal.

Later, some historian may be able to trace the exact causes of the change in the position and estimation of the two sexes in England; of the decline in institutional religion, traditionalism and conventional uniformity. More, certainly, was washed away in the blood-bath of Flanders than just hope and faith and the genius and youth of a generation. It may be generations before Europe and the world discover just what was lost and just what was found on the fields of Flanders.

One must throw a sop to Cerberus, or all the old women of both sexes, who live in the Cromwell Road, or Bath, or Cheltenham, will rise in their wrath. *The Germans were swine*; at least everyone in England said they were swine, and so I must join in. I tried hard to think that I had only met swine in Germany before the War. But had I? In Munich, Berlin, and in the country districts, had I been badly treated? I certainly could not remember that they had been impolite or had overcharged. Yet I did remember that I had often been overcharged in Switzerland and Italy—less often in France. No! It was unfortunate—very—but I could not remember that I had ever been cheated by Germans. And I could not say the same for any other country I had been in, except Burma and China. But my personal experiences were no criterion. The Germans *were* swine because everyone said so. What had been my impression of the Germans? A rather clumsy, awkward, earnest people, most of the elderly ones rather plain and fat. Their cooking was certainly awful; but in character I had found them honest, very sentimental, and kind to their children; their animals as well cared for as their

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kitchens were clean. The middle classes I thought rather wooden and stiff. All classes were neat in their clothing, but had, I thought, the most appalling taste in colours. Germans apparently love magenta, a colour I abhor. Temperamentally I had thought they were sentimental—a characteristic of their music—fond of Christmas trees and singing carols and talking about Jesus and angels, yet truthful, honest and warm-hearted. German cities were clean, their streets orderly. I had seen many German officers and policemen between 1910 and 1914, but I had not noticed that they swaggered very much, except one young officer I had seen in Munich. No, it was no good, the Germans were not really swine. Still as everyone was so busy saying so, including members of my own family, I must say so too, or I should be accused of being a pro-German. That would be an awful affair!

How often in pre-War days we had raced against German crews on the bobsleigh run at Engleberg and other places, generally we had won. The 'Skipper' and 'Brake' did all the work. As a member of the crew I had done nothing except grip hold of the straps and number three's legs, wondering as we flashed down those icy sunlit inclines, and tore round the crystal walled 'hairpins', on which of the sharply pointed stumps of pine trees sticking out of the snow far below I and the other three were to be impaled. After these races there had never been any grumbling or unsportsmanlike behaviour on the part of the competing German crews. On the contrary we were the greatest friends with the Germans and Austrians, whom we almost invariably vanquished.

Von Stockar, Von Goetz and the rest of them—how charming they all had been! As charming as those bare-footed boys and girls, the poorly dressed children of

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Rhenish peasants, whom I used to meet singing and playing their violins in my tramps through the woods near Freudenberg.

Endlessly the streets echoed with 'God Save the King'. How sick both God and the King must get of that unattractive German tune! The Almighty did not seem to 'save' the King from very much, not even from getting sore throats or attacks of bronchitis, nor was the King's position really so precarious that we must always be imploring Olympus to prop it up. It seemed a little undignified. Had we at the back of our minds serious doubts about the monarchy? Or when we sang 'God Save the King' did we really only mean 'God keep things as they are'? Britons, we repeatedly assured the world, 'never would be slaves'. No! No! No! We *won't* be slaves! The people in the 'Eighties and 'Nineties who sang this so lustily, and many who still shouted it, were often servile snobs, browbeaten workmen or sweated shop-girls—they were in fact slaves. A man who constantly assures the world that he is 'honest' or 'free'—does he suspect himself that he is not?

CHAPTER XVII

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A fortnight in Netley Hospital, and I was practically fit again. If the numerous doses of anti-tetanus serum had caused the agonizing pains in every joint on my way down from the front, the serum had likely enough saved me from worse things. Anyway, the wound was healing, and the cramp and fever were gone.

Fearing I should be sent to a dull Base hospital for duty, I asked to be sent back to the Regiment as soon as possible. I liked the men and felt as proud of its achievements, almost as if the weeks I had spent with it had been years.

At home, I learnt of a queer coincidence. In my infancy my Irish nurse's first admirer had been a 4th Dragoon Guardsman, the Regiment being then stationed, as was my father, at Dundalk. Perambulators being in those days almost unheard-of contraptions in Ireland, the gallant Dragoon had shown his affection by relieving my nurse of a sickly, puling encumbrance, carrying me often in his arms.

At the War Office I saw S., and afterwards met B. in St. James's Park (both afterwards became Major-Generals) and was promised an early return to regimental duty. I felt relieved. There was a depressing feeling of emptiness in England. Nearly everybody I knew of my own age and sex was in France. The well-dressed society girls for whom lint-and-bandage parties provided oppor-

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tunity for spending a chatty afternoon eating almond cake, discussing the 'excitements' of the War, comparing the gallantries and eccentricities of the returned soldier, did not fill the gap. If the loud-mouthed patriotism and endless anti-German propaganda was tedious, the bean-feasting at the Savoy and the Berkeley, the Trocadero and the Carlton, was not much better. I actually found myself looking forward to getting back to the Front. Then one day in Piccadilly I met Foxy Aylmer, home on short leave. The Regiment, he said, wanted me back, and Generals de Lisle and Mullens would both back up my application.

I told him I had already applied. But for several weeks I was still officially a convalescent, doing odd jobs. For a fortnight I was sent as Medical Officer-in-Charge to a Remount Depot, a dismal and muddy spot. There I met a new type of officer—neither 'Regular' nor 'Temporary' but the profiteering variety. Night after night one had to sit and listen to them. Several were titled but impetunious 'county' folk, discussing their deals on behalf of the Government. They were—if they were to be believed—simply rogues, buying horses in Ireland and 'showing' them as purchased at rather more than the price agreed upon with the seller, afterwards halving the difference with the vendors. Much of this sort of thing seemed to be going on, and one was rather sickened.

It was from some of these horsey folk in uniform, whose patriotic concern in the War was so profitable, that I first heard abuse of the conscientious objector. I had little sympathy then with 'Conchies', should not, I think, in any case have had the pluck to admit any, though I realized that they must have had great moral courage, even if in some cases they lacked the physical pluck which is rather more an animal than a human quality. Once on a road outside one of the camps I saw

one of these wretched 'conchies' followed by a jeering mob. The boy's hat had been snatched from his head and trampled in the mud; pale and breathless, he kept close to the fence while the crowd pressed in around him with taunts and threats. To see him shrinking back, defenceless and alone before this crowd of girls and loafers, was an ugly sight. I began secretly to sympathize.

And there were other profiteers beside horse-copers. Had not the Government decided, despite protests in the House of Lords, to bribe the kept women of those who went to the War with generous separation allowances to which they were not legally entitled. There were already women in our village at home, married and unmarried, who openly boasted in the local pubs that they had never been so well off, so masterless, so free from household cares as they had been since they persuaded their man to join up. It was disturbing that those who abused the 'conchie' were often, one way and another, doing quite well out of the War. I was not sorry when I found myself again in a French train on my way up from Rouen to the Headquarters of the First Cavalry Division. At Havre a much-bemedalled and rather cynical colonel expressed the opinion that I was 'a particularly damned fool to be in such a cast-iron hurry to get back to the Front'. A fool perhaps. My haste was the result of sheer boredom, but I was not the only fool who found England in time of war impossible and danger rather fascinating. Even to the most fastidious and unromantic there can be something attractive about life at the Front, something profoundly moving in the attack, in the silent march through darkness of armed men towards flashing horizons, where so many—and perhaps you, too—are to meet your last dawn. To advance thus—willingly, open-armed, even though afraid—towards Death, is surely a

triumph over that accident of Destiny that gives each one of us our being.

Nevertheless, I had an attack of 'cold feet' in the train as it crawled from Havre slowly up towards the great slaughter yard at Ypres. At intervals of an hour or so we would pass improvised ambulance trains returning from the Front crammed with wounded. The sisters and orderlies were busy changing the dressings. Through every carriage window one could see still forms, muffled heads, and blood-soaked dressings. Here and there bandages, foul and gory, that had caught in the doorhandles, trailed like streamers in the wind, or lay in sodden heaps on the running boards. One had already noticed, peering through the drizzle, how from the bushes that grew on the railway embankments between Rouen and Hazebrouck, soiled and bloodstained rags thrown out from these passing trains flared as pennons of evil omen, brutal reminders of war's one and only certain result. In the sidings wads of dressings and oddments of discarded uniform, old socks, and boots lay about between the metals. The railway track and principal stations, uncleaned for months, were beginning to smell; grass and weeds were fast growing between the rails. Six months of neglect and the cessation of nearly all cleansing and repair were making themselves felt too obviously in every direction. At many of the wayside stations unshaven, begrimed soldiers, French or English, stood about in depressed groups, huddled under the cold rains of January. Adjoining the railway lines, the endless muddy camps and neglected latrines and camp kitchens strewn with garbage gave a squalid wretchedness to the scene. The smiling sunlit France, the fair France of ripening fruit and vines and waving corn through which we had adventured in August, 1914, was gone! From the rather glum and strained faces of French men and women

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it was plain that much of pre-War contentment, politeness, and gaiety had vanished from the pleasant land. Would it ever return? I began to wonder at my impulsive haste to be back again in this sea of mud, squalor and snells. My wonder had begun to turn almost to regret by the time we had reached Boulogne. 'Train load after train load of wounded, passing us, dotted the 'i's' and crossed the 't's' of my doubts.

I have heard it said, and can almost believe it, that many young officers and men, coming out for the first time, became so depressed after passing these apparently unending train loads of wounded that they arrived at the front already in a condition of neurasthenia or 'shell shock'. At some of the stations a train load of these newcomers would be halted close alongside one of these improvised ambulance trains, smelling of gas-gangrene and other foul and septic wounds. The newcomers would stare, at first curious and awestruck and then dismally thoughtful, through their carriage windows into the darkened compartments of the train alongside, so crowded with moaning sufferers or bandaged forms all too significantly motionless. Some of the less severely wounded—'sitting cases'—would then come to the windows to make mocking suggestions concerning their heartfelt regret at leaving France so soon, concerning their anxiety, though wounded, to change places with the new arrivals on their way to the 'hell up yonder'.

'Oh, you youngsters are in for a proper treat, you are!' one of the bandaged ones would declare with malicious delight. 'Get well canned on ration rum if you get 'arf a chance. 'Arf you chaps will never get another mucking chance, and the other 'arf will git back to Blighty, if they're lucky, with one of their own mucking kidneys between their mucking teeth!'

A succession of these encouragements could produce

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almost the same effect on the young soldier as a heavy bombardment. He would console himself with getting drunk on French cognac or in writing feverish letters of farewell to his mother, his brothers, or his fiancée. It struck me as bad Staff work to let the two streams of men pass in this way; or did our Staff suppose it would 'excite a desire for revenge'? Possibly they didn't give the matter a thought, or it was unavoidable.

By a kind of defensive reaction as I stared through the carriage window at the squalor outside, my mind went back to an old Tudor house in the Eastern Counties in which we had lived, where Robert Peel and Walpole had once been mischievous pupils. Beneath my window there had been a great climbing rose, irrepressible and sturdy. It must have been there for generations. Amongst its branches, some almost as thick as my wrist, the spotted fly-catchers would come to build their nests, and every March in the avenue of lime trees opposite the chaffinches would repeat their endless refrain: 'Wee-Kitty-meets-me . . . and Sue-meets-Theo . . .' the budding lime trees were told, while the listening lilacs trembled with the blackbirds' call. When the old apple trees in the garden came into blossom the swallows would circle and dart with short sharp cries above their lichened branches. Motor cars were unborn, and all about that garden and the countryside was peace. Only the cackle of the geese at the farm and the blacksmith's 'clink' . . . 'clink' . . . came to remind me that just outside our gates was a village where Tudor cottages leaned against Cromwellian. In the quiet lanes around, where in February came the first violet and in June the honeysuckle and dog-rose, where on a long summer day one scarcely met a soul, I used to watch the yellowhammers flit from side to side of the hedge, settling for a moment on a spray to demand a 'little-bit-of-bread-no-c.h.e.e.s.e.'. Not far off was a

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crumbling tower and beside it a diminutive church where Plantagenet warriors had their tombs. Here beside the old buttressed tithe-barn there must once have been a White-Garden, for the crocuses, campanulas, and ragged hollyhocks there were always white, and over broken buttress and balustrade the roses climbed like drifting snow. . . .

Life on this planet could then be tolerable if only men would leave one another alone. But amidst this war of filth and hate, the thought of those swallows wheeling in the long ago above those blossoming apple-trees was a contrast too great to dwell upon. I might have wanted to run away.

I found the Regiment resting in billets. I got a cheery welcome but also the news that my own corps considered I was too senior to return to the charge of only one regiment. I was temporarily detailed to supervise the evacuation of the wounded of the Brigade from the trenches in the area which we were to occupy in front of Ypres.

It was too sad to find that my horse, 'White Stocking', who had carried me for so many weeks and out of so many tight places, had been sent down to the Base sick and badly lamed only a day or two before my return. A big horse like the first mount I had had in the earlier months of the South African War, he had been, as white-stockinged horses are reputed to be, good-tempered and dependable and always game. I rode very light, under eleven stone in marching order, so he had always been in condition, never sick or sorry. It was because he looked so fresh at the finish of each day's march that I had been asked to take messages to our billeting parties, or to search for missing first-line transport or to do other odd jobs. I really grieved to think that I should never see such an old and tried friend again.

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On our way up, on the squalid road between Poperinghe and Ypres, we stopped and talked to some of the passing units of infantry and cavalry which we were relieving. They gave us most gloomy accounts of the line we were to occupy. Whole brigades were apparently being crippled with a new disease resembling frostbitten feet, and men had to be carried out of the line, literally by the thousand. Evidently our trenches up there were in a miserable state. They gave us fair warning.

'Sir! You and your lot—are just going up to hell!' Certainly they looked hollow-eyed and unkempt. Their haggard, strained faces, the filthy condition of their kit and rifles, and the way they swayed and staggered in their ranks from exhaustion, a kind of despairing over-fatigue, was impressive. Many looked jaundiced; all, including officers, were unshaven.

We found the German trenches overlooked those which our Brigade were to take over; and that many of our trenches were half full of liquid mud. The line was not only irregular but very lightly held on the British side, and the narrowness of the salient made it awkward and unhealthy whenever the Germans pressed their attack simultaneously on the two sides.

I had to pass 'Hell Fire Corner' twice every day; it had not then got its name, for the shelling at the crossing was only very occasional. Though the railway line was derelict, it was reassuring to see the wife of the level-crossing keeper still working in her cottage garden. Every morning she was out with her little daughter carrying an apron full of grain for her poultry, both quite regardless of the bursts of shelling. It began to get more and more precarious there. Then one day as I hurried past I noticed that this homely scene had vanished. There was no longer the cheerful clucking of the hens and the

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small girl to smile to me and wave her doll. Where the little garden had been was a black, smoking crater, one side of the cottage was gone, fragments of furniture and clothing were littered about. . . .

In this part of the line, Brigade and the 4th Dragoon Guards Headquarters were within fifty yards of one another; both were little more than roofed-in recesses in the side of a rise in the ground, a bank of mud along the top of which ran our trenches. In between the two stray bullets sometimes skipped and ricocheted about in unexpected ways; someone got a bullet in his brain just outside Brigade Headquarters on the day on which we were making preliminary arrangements to take over from the outgoing Brigade.

The trenches the 4th were to occupy were certainly poor. They had no fire-step and were so narrow that there was scarcely room for two men to pass and none for a stretcher to be carried. In most places the parapet was only about four feet high, in several it was less than breast-high and very sketchy at that. Any sense of security in these trenches was in any case fallacious for many of the covers of the single course of sandbags had rotted away on their outer side or had been split by enemy bullets, and most of their contents had dribbled out under the constant rain. On the second day 'Sambo' Sewell, temporarily in command of the 4th, and I were having a quiet stroll around his trenches—it would be nearer the truth to say we were having a tiring crawl—when the Boche suddenly decided he would blow in a chunk of our weak parapet. We only just missed being scuppered by a series of whizzbangs that blew in about twenty yards of the trench, knocked out a machine-gun, and killed and wounded several of our men. Years afterwards in an old tunic I found the crumpled 'order' I had carried back myself to Brigade Headquarters.

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We had to dash back over their bodies. Fortunately the Boche did not follow up his shelling by a raid or we should have been completely cut off, for we happened to be at the moment in the far end of a blind trench only about three feet deep. Like other trenches it simply disappeared into no-man's-land—this most appropriate name had not then, I think, been invented.

A shelter, half hut, half dug-out, called Cavan's Post, was the point selected for the nightly collection of all wounded by the ambulance wagons that came up from Ypres. It was separated from Brigade Headquarters by a slope six or seven hundred yards wide, facing the Germans and partly covered with a thin plantation of very young saplings, their stems about an inch or an inch and a half thick. The Germans sprayed this plantation with their machine-guns, and their snipers with telescopic sights apparently amused themselves by cutting down these saplings one after another with bullets. Gradually they razed the lot to the ground, thus destroying any cover. It was necessary for me to pass Cavan's Post and regimental and brigade Headquarters several times during daylight, and each day as the cover diminished it got more exciting. Captain Tommy Crean, V.C., whom I relieved at Cavan's Post, was a most cheery, dependable fellow. On the day I took over I felt he almost deserved another decoration for the calm deliberate way in which he strolled across the six hundred yards between the two places. It was distinctly noisy in the little plantation, bullets snapping and cracking in all directions, and I suggested we should quicken our pace; 'Tommy', a big heavy man, thought not.

'I did,' he explained, 'run like hell through this plantation for the first day or two; but you soon get tired of hurrying in all this mud and broken boughs. And I'm not going to run six hundred yards a dozen times a day

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"O" Form - Report of MESSAGES AND SIGNALS

TO: _____	FROM: _____	DATE: _____
SUBJECT: _____		CLASS: _____

1. _____

TO: 2 Cav Bde

FROM: H. S. 1

DATE: 4-2-15

CLASS: AAA

SHELLING of my trench line

stopped AAA. Damage done

Artillery of position on the left of

my right section broken down

one officer slightly wounded two (3)

men killed two (6) wounded one machine

gun 500. Answered AAA

I think I have located German

battery and have sent an officer

to report to French Artillery. Off-

with you AAA

Please send guns not to shell orange

trenches unless they report first on net

AAA

FROM: 11 DG

PLACE: with 1st squadron

TIME: 11.50 a.m.

STANDARD FORM NO. 1 (10-30,000) (10-30,000) (10-30,000)

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even to amuse the Boches. Besides, the chances of their hitting you are not very good. There are still enough of these little saplings left to disturb their aim!

'You think they are deliberately cutting them down with their fire?'

'Oh, yes,' he roared contentedly in my ear; 'of course it's getting worse. I'm damned glad you are relieving us. In another few days it will be really nasty. And now it's nearly February, the light gets better every day!' he grinned maliciously.

'You're a bigger man than I, Tommy; so the Boche, when they finish their wood-cutting operations, will have a smaller target until your brigade—and you—come back again!'

Ypres seemed almost like home in those days, so far back from the line, so busy and cheerful. Though the Town Hall, the Cathedral, and the Museum had been partly burnt out, the town itself was not extensively damaged. Most of the shops and houses were intact and occupied. At times the streets were quite lively, the market in the big square thronged with Belgian and French women, going about their daily business quite unconcernedly. Occasionally, about once or twice in an hour, a shell would fall somewhere, but no one took much notice; mostly the shells fell on the north-east side of the town between the Lille and the Menin Gates. The young Belgian girls in the town were having a high old time with more lovers and money than they knew what to do with. There was an atmosphere of feverish gaiety and reckless abandon, especially in the evening, and we lived like fighting cocks.

Occasionally we dashed down to Calais or Dunkirk in a car, and came back loaded up with cases of delicacies sent over to the mess by Fortnum and Mason, or we returned with a load of champagne, oysters, lobsters, Buz-

zard's cakes, and all sorts of other luxuries the friends of the First Cavalry Division and the special friends of the Regiment were collecting for us at the ports. We lived in mud, we slept in mud, and we began to get lousy, but I never ate and drank so much or felt so well in my life. It was for many a case of eat and drink, tell obscene stories, and seduce—anyone suitable—for to-morrow or the day after you may quite possibly die and die miserably. One member of the mess, who had been brought up on the whip in a very strict household, had the most extensive and curiously detailed knowledge of various forms of sexual indulgence which I have ever come across. In his case repression had become an obsession. He could have given Balzac and other experts five yards start in a hundred and beaten them easily. Kraft Ebbing's *Psycopathica Sexualis*, which is fairly explicit in parts, was nothing to this gallant cavalry subaltern's account of his experiences, investigations, and inventions. There was accordingly considerable competition amongst the brigade signallers to be on duty after 'dinner' when he was recounting his droll stories. His idea of hell was, I remember, the one that took first prize. 'To be compelled to sleep in a very small room with a very fat woman in a very small bed on a very hot night with the window shut!'

Though we had a most excellent French *chef-de-cuisine* we sat on biscuit boxes and lay on the mud floor to sleep. A dug-out, scarcely five feet high, in which we dined, was also our sleeping room, besides accommodating several men of the Brigade Signalling troop. So tightly were we packed on the floor that, if the General dozed unexpectedly, he might wake up to find his head pillowed comfortably in the lap of a snoring private of the Signals. Outside all was mud and noise, squalor and drizzle, and not inconsiderable danger. Inside, protected

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by about four feet of logs, brushwood, bricks and mud, there was a comfortable fug, a strong odour of port wine, cigars and whisky, the rich fruity aroma of Buzzard's cakes and a cheerful Rabelaisian—not to say hilarious—obscurity.

In the chill drizzle of February, 1915, greenish-black bundles, hunched and shrivelled forms, sagged on the wire in no-man's-land. Many of these bodies, German or English, had dangled there since the previous November. Men wounded and caught in the wire had hung out for days in the cold rain and died more of exposure than wounds, after being in some cases partly eaten alive by rats. For a day or two some of them had made feeble signals for help, lifting an arm when they heard friendly voices in the trenches—then the signals grew fainter and less frequent and finally ceased. Some mercifully had been put out of their misery by a bullet from friend or foe. And still these tattered bundles of putrefying remains, clothed in blackened rags, hung offensively in the wind.

Our trenches, in spite of our attempted improvements, were still little more than ditches half filled with yellow mud; here and there they were foul with corpses and sometimes with sewage. We tried to remove some of the bodies which had been trodden into the mud in the bottom of the trench and half buried. In one place the head and shoulder of a Lancer protruded, and not far off the stockinged, gangrenous leg of a Highlander. But it was often difficult and inadvisable in such narrow trenches to remove the bodies. Prising them up seemed to suck in the semi-liquid foundation of the walls of the trench which we were trying to raise higher with sandbags. So men compromised between safety and hygiene by spreading two or three damaged blankets over the corpses and allowing the liquid mud that spread over

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or soaked up through them to form a passable footway.

Our trenches were not continuous with those of the units on the right and left, but petered out amongst shell-holes and bushes. Quite unexpectedly one might find oneself well out in no-man's-land and perhaps being fired at by both sides.

P., one of the Brigade Staff, and I had frequently to go over from Brigade Headquarters to see the C.O.'s of other units in the line. At that time our Brigade, about fourteen hundred strong, was holding a considerable length of front line in the woods on the south side of the salient. To avoid the deep mud, splintered trees, and other obstructions in the woods, which made the track behind the front lines almost impassable, we often went along our front line trenches as far as possible and then made short cuts across the intervening bays of no-man's-land to the small, wooded salients which were being held by the Lancers and Hussars. On one of these raw mornings about the end of February, as we trudged along in the mud, the mist suddenly thickened to a dense fog. Well out in no-man's-land we were hopelessly lost, and, owing to the way the line zigzagged about, a compass was of little use. It being easy in a thick mist to walk unknowingly into the German trenches, we decided to halt until a clear patch in the fog showed us where we were. Then quite suddenly the fog lifted, but only for a moment. We had just time to realize that we were standing on the skyline in a bare field about midway between the two lines of trenches—at this point about three hundred yards apart—when the fog descended again. By a piece of bad luck both sides had seen us and began firing viciously, supposing we were either part of an enemy patrol or two deserters. In the hope of finding some dead ground we began to run. P. shouted out that he thought he had caught sight of the wood held by the Lancers. We had

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not run fifty yards before we found ourselves in a network of loose coils of fine blue wire which had evidently been deliberately spread over all this part of the hill. In a moment the wire was entangled round our field boots and nearly every buckle and button we possessed.

Meanwhile the fog had lifted again and the firing increased. The faster we ran the worse the firing got and the worse the wire. In our efforts to keep going in the wire and mud we fell repeatedly, at length doing little more than roll, agitated bundles of wire, for we were now on a slope just sufficiently steep to make rolling possible. Both sides were still firing into the fog in our direction, but aiming much too high. It would have been pretty hopeless to have got wounded when any attempt even to put on a tourniquet to stop bleeding in one's own leg or arm would have been almost impossible. We must have run and rolled quite a long way—unknowingly going parallel to our own front line—finishing up by staggering into the lines of the 9th Lancers, covered in wire and mud and nearly exhausted. We were welcomed with ironical cheers because for the last hundred and fifty yards or so we had been running and rolling in a perfectly safe hollow of dead ground.

The only alternative to these short cuts was to trudge through the boggy and half-ploughed-up woodland immediately behind our discontinuous and rather sketchy trenches. Weighed down with heavy boots, trench coat, and accoutrements, it was an exhausting performance, especially as it had to be done often. The woods were partly held by the enemy, who had stationed expert marksmen with telescopic sights at the upper end of each of the clear rides that had been left as a protection against fire when the woods were planted. These lanes being perfectly straight and occurring about every two hundred yards or so, were nasty places to cross. The ground

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at our end was too low and boggy to make it possible to have any sort of trench cut in those haphazard days. But even a German sharpshooter could be slack and was not so likely to get you if you were the first to skip across those fifteen-foot lanes; but with his rifle carefully sandbagged up and trained on a point about four foot above the ground on the centre of the opening, he was pretty certain to get the second man who dashed across, and naturally the interval for reloading made it safer for number three than number four. We used to humbug the snipers sometimes by throwing a trench coat and a cap across to represent number two. The marksman would let rip, and you sprang across as soon as you heard the crack of his rifle, devoutly hoping there was not a second marksman with his finger on the trigger. The anxiety of everyone to be the first across and their reluctance to be number four was always entertaining. Once I got a bullet in the heel of my boot.

Cavan's Post was whizzbanged nearly all day, the Germans believing it was still being used as an artillery observation post by the French and English field batteries which were about a hundred and fifty yards behind it. Most of the shells just grazed the roof, bringing down a lot of earth inside and generally shaking the place up. Those that just missed the top of the dug-out pitched in the field beyond, which was a little lower, bursting about twenty yards in front of our guns without doing very much harm. But they were nasty vicious little shells that gave out venomous blue fumes and exploded with a spiteful metallic ring like the rattling of chains. Their fuses showed that some were from captured French '75's'. The shells from captured English guns at any rate sounded less vicious.

The Post, a hut about twelve feet square, swarmed with every sort of vermin. In the centre a large, mildewy

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straw palliasse with a rotten cover had been spread over some planks on trestles and did duty as a kind of communal bedstead. I would go to sleep on it alone and wake up to find a sergcant from the Signals or Transport and a Staff Captain or a stray orderly asleep beside me. Inside and outside the hut debris of food was everywhere. The rotten palliasse itself simply teemed with mice, and to judge from the number of small pink babies that were always falling out of it they must have been increasing inside at an extraordinary pace. Their very numbers made them adventurous. Rattle B., then a Staff Captain, sleeping beside me, used to wake up cursing because the mice were running over his face—over-population, as he complained, always does make for reckless discontent or wild adventure. If one moved a knee or an elbow on this bed there would be loud squeaks of protest from the swarming underworld in the straw beneath. Still, Cavan's Post felt a very haven of refuge because it was nearly out of rifle range from the German lines. I only saw one man—a sergeant—hit there. He got a spent bullet into his collar-bone as he stood at the door.

'I'm hit, sir!'

'You are,' I said. The spent bullet was easily lifted out; his collar-bone was, as far as I could tell, not even cracked. He was very much relieved; the impact had felt like a heavy blow.

There has been much criticism by superior persons of what Mr. St. John Ervine would describe as the ultra 'refained' type, because some of those who have written accounts of the War have dared to mention latrines. The writers are suspected of having taken pornographic delight in the subject—or of an impish wish to *épater le bourgeois*.

Possibly the elaboration of grimy details has been overdone, a kind of after-War reaction against the more

conventional Englishman's self-conscious shyness which is almost an obsession. He has a really quite unnecessary degree of diffidence and modesty about the functions of his body, a besetting 'lavatory complex', which astonishes and amuses foreigners. Certainly to see a middle-aged Privy Councillor running considerable risk of permanently injuring his bladder, because he is in terror lest some English female present may suspect he is about to retire to empty it, is one of the minor comedies of our English 'culture'. The old French lady who during the War was the attendant at the Boulogne Town Station, and who always accompanied the blushing English subaltern into the lavatory to give a final polish to the seat, surely had the laugh of us.

Of course, no normal healthy-minded person is any more inclined under ordinary circumstances to enlarge on the subject of latrines, any more than on the details of cleaning the teeth, trimming the fingernails, or any other of the humble services which it is necessary to render daily to our bodies to keep them wholesome and healthy. But when every visit to what corresponds to the 'lavatory' of decorous suburbia, may be at a very appreciable risk of *death or mutilation*, and when a part at least of the duty of both officers and men consists in the frequent selection of fresh sites and the construction of these necessary but unbeautiful resorts, even the most genteel-minded old bachelor from Hampstead, the most 'refained' maiden lady from Balham or Ealing, would find that the subject was, perforce, one of considerable daily preoccupation, even of resentful discussion. The imminence of death kills the conventions and the conventional 'silences' of the most shamefaced.

Obviously any shell from the enemy was liable to plump into one or another of these unpleasant places and, scattering their vile contents in all directions, render the

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immediate construction of another one a matter of extreme urgency. Even the most fastidious person can realize that any account of trench warfare can no more completely ignore this unpleasant subject than it could completely ignore the festering, fly-infected wounds, the foul gas-gangrene, the stench of unwashed human bodies herded together in soaked and muddy clothing in foggy dug-outs, the prevalence of vermin and flies and of numerous decaying corpses and all the other inevitable accompaniments of prolonged and localized war.

So it would be mere affectation to pretend that sanitary arrangements, existent or non-existent, do not assume an importance in one's daily life in war, that they do not possess in smug villas and respectable boarding houses in civilized countries in peace time, where ordinary folk scarcely ever give such questions a thought. The insanitary side of war used to be studiously ignored in the highfalutin war propaganda with which we were all deluged *before* the last war. It is not then a gratuitous dabbling in filth to emphasize the *insanitary* side of war as well as its *insanity*.

Will some Rodin dare to depict realistically in a new war group, a warrior, fear-haunted, running down a trench sodden with sewage, treading unintentionally as he runs on the shattered, half-conscious form of one of his comrades, only to find another of his dearest friends lying face downwards in a latrine, his spade beside him, his skull completely smashed in by an iron latrine bucket that had been hurled at him by an exploding shell? That is the kind of group of statuary which perhaps needs to be exhibited in our public squares quite as much as the conventional grim hero, with stony jaw and fixed bayonet, about to disembowel another human being he has been persuaded is 'the enemy'. As if a bayonet charge was a common event in war!

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The vicissitudes of war often introduced a certain grotesque humour—perhaps one should say a certain vulgar buffoonery—into even a visit to the latrine. In the earlier months of trench warfare, these visits were not always lightly to be undertaken.

In front of Ypres it was considered dangerous to walk about much alone in the broken woodland just behind the line, because, owing to the narrowness of the Ypres salient, spent bullets and occasional shells might come from almost any direction; the likelihood of a man being wounded badly and not being found was therefore considerable. Accordingly we were urged to do most things in pairs. Another officer, also temporarily attached to the Cavalry, and I, would set out together every morning from Cavan's Post. My companion was a large, slow-moving person whose every act in life even the most insignificant or the most intimate was undertaken with a measured dignity which an expert mimic would have loved to imitate. Unfortunately, the neighbourhood of the latrine was more and more frequently shelled because it happened to be in front of three of our batteries and—from one direction—just within range of German machine-guns. Eventually, more discreet than valorous, I decided to confine my visits there to the hours of darkness. But not so my pompous stable-companion, who would set forth for this resort regularly every morning with all the stolid obstinate punctuality of the good Englishman. And then the fun began!

Some German artillery observation officer with a depraved sense of humour had evidently noticed my friend's habits. Perhaps because of his very slow and stately walk the German decided that he must be a great personage well worth the killing, or it may be he loosed off his guns in sheer devilry for the fun of seeing this large and dignified man, his garments absurdly disarranged or his

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braces trailing behind him, running for dear life. Large as he was, he would dart about in a way he could not have done since he left his preparatory school. Literally he seemed to be followed about—sometimes for twenty minutes or more at a time—by whizzbangs. Often after a breathless morning of unwonted exercise he would return to Cavan's Post all hot and muddy and angry, *very* angry. The Germans, he said, were no *gentlemen*! He had spent the morning in considerable danger and discomfort, and yet nothing was accomplished, nothing done. What made him so much more angry was that a party of our own gunners on a tree platform near our batteries also enjoyed with fellow feeling his daily exercises. His country excursions in *deshabillé* were in fact roundly cheered as he doubled and redoubled backwards and forwards amongst the tree stumps to dodge the shells. He was stupid enough to go over one day and complain to one of the battery commanders concerning our men's 'want of respect for an officer', stalking heavily across with the large malacca cane which he always carried with great dignity. What the Battery Commander said to him I do not know; but if I know anything of Field Gunners—and I have met just a few—I expect he was briefly if not profanely told to put his dignity and scandalized sense of modesty where the historic monkey was said to have put the nuts. As long as he stayed at Cavan's Post he kept us amused. He has now become a great man. Should he recognize himself from this account, I hope he will pardon a profane reminder of his morning exercises at Klein Zillebeke.

It was at Zillebeke that some intrepid Germans with rifles—it was even said they had a machine-gun—installed themselves well inside our line amongst the ruined walls and cellars. How they got water we never discovered. But both food and ammunition lay all about in

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plenty. They must have killed quite a number, as every night we had to pass within a few yards of these ruins with rations and reinforcements or with convoys of sick or wounded men. Sometimes whole companies afflicted with 'trench feet' limped past this spot in the drizzle and darkness.

It was supposed at first that the flash and the bullets of these concealed snipers came from the German trenches. I never heard that these adventurous ones were caught, though after a time their presence was more than suspected. One night, passing this mound of ruins in pouring rain, I heard a kitten faintly mewling. I thought I would look for it; possibly the wretched animal was starving. Besides, a kitten would make a fine mascot, especially a black one. But I had not gone more than fifty yards from the column when a flash and a report coming from within a yard or two discouraged me from any further investigation. It seemed to be nobody's business to search these heap of ruins behind our lines, though some who started off to look for derelict kittens and other 'souvenirs' did not return.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE IRON ROAD

Captain Bairnsfather's cheery genius—'worth at least a Brigade'—was still undiscovered, yet in those early days there had been much hearty good humour. But after Neuve Chapelle and our rather disastrous encounters with the Germans in April, in the spring of 1915, after the chemical war had begun on land and the submarine war had developed at sea, the humorous aspects of the situation were less and less obvious. Things were getting difficult at home; the War was going badly on all sides.

In England there is not one but several nations, and our New Army comrades were mostly strangers with an outlook and ideas differing from our own; it was fashionable to think them inferior; class distinctions and educational snobbishness had created gulfs not easy to pass. There was a change too in the quality of their courage. Men were just as brave, but propaganda had done its deadly work, and so it was now a courage from which the sense of chivalry had departed; just grim endurance and mutual savagery. It was, for instance, not uncommon to hear our gunners say after a successful hit that they would wait a few minutes before firing again on the same target until there was time for a number of fresh men, stretcher-bearers and others, to be busy with the wounded. Then they loosed off and got an even larger bag than before. This simply could not have happened

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in the Boer War; we were stepping backwards, Herbert Spencer's prophesy of 'Rebarbarization' was being fulfilled. So discipline without comradeship, and death without reward, became the order of the day. 'Kill more Germans' was the new slogan that came out from England, 'kill until you are killed, and then as you fall almost unnoticed a conscript will step into your shoes'.

As more and more of the New Armies arrived, the change in spirit and feeling intensified, and the older Regular Army, in which officers and men had known one another for years, almost disappeared. We began to realize that the War must now go on indefinitely, that there would be no glorious and dashing victory for anyone; only demoralizing waste and slow exhaustion. The hypocrisy and untruthfulness of much of our highly-coloured propaganda about Belgian 'atrocities' were beginning to be realized. The Belgians themselves blurted out certain things which gave the show away. Many of them, it seems, fearing French ambitions and policy in Europe, had at first actually welcomed the German invasion! We had never been told this in that first week in August, 1914. Also, we were realizing that we were not really any better morally or braver than the German soldiers who fought against us. It was just a huge competition in murder, in which two of the very best of the white races were exterminating one another. Disgust was felt by many for our Belgian allies; others distrusted the French. The French in turn were showing quite plainly their distrust of English good faith by refusing our Army its more obviously convenient position next the Channel ports. The Italians were evidently 'bargain hunting—not fighting'. As for the famous Russian 'steam roller', it was living up to its primitive prototype, cumbersome, ineffective, blundering, and erratic. Her army of heroic almost unarmed peasants, mainly officered

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by incompetent and notoriously corrupt 'nobles', much more at home on the Croisette at Cannes, the Promenade des Anglais, and the racecourse at Auteuil than on the Polish frontier, was checkmated: the troops wasting away with disease, ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-disciplined, ill-armed, and often inactive.

This change of feeling and increased bitterness became more marked after Jutland. That great sea-fight was for us, morally speaking, almost a defeat. A severe hammering to the Grand Fleet of Britain by a German Fleet not much more than half as strong; and we were told that it was *our* Fleet that had turned away. A naval newcomer, an amateur, had as it were tied in the first round against the world's rather boastful and over-confident professional heavyweight. We had claimed to be mistress of the seas and had had six hundred years experience of sea-fights; and the Germans with their smaller fleet were only beginners. Soldiers as well as sailors felt sore about Jutland; pride was touched, confidence shaken.

The New Armies were appearing upon the scene full of zest and a little astonished at themselves; taking themselves and salutes and 'King's Regulations' and in fact everything else very seriously. Kitchener's army was arriving, to be followed by 'Derby' volunteers, 'white-feather men', and more or less reluctant 'conscripts'. Certain Regular officers, unreasonably enough, were a little jealous of these newcomers who were invading their privileged profession and making it 'cheap'. The glamour and kudos of war-making, once the perquisites of a minority, were being too much vulgarized. The prestige of their class was waning, disappearing amidst mud and vermin. Favouritism and dishonourable manœuvring for decorations and safe billets at the Base had to some extent existed in previous wars, but now all these 'out-

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siders' would discover the nakedness of the land and learn that the grocer's assistant, the young chemist or architect, could make with a minimum of training quite a brave and efficient officer.

Then there were so many young officers, almost too good-looking and much too young, who apparently had powerful friends at court—mostly lady friends—and who became A.D.C.'s to Corps Commanders or obtained safe Staff billets with the most astonishing rapidity and persistence. There was a profusion of these bright and haughty young men in fur collars, wearing eye-glasses and smelling rather of scent and face powder, who, expensively tailored and safely ensconced in palatial châteaux, five, ten or fifteen miles from the front line, were able to eat, drink, play bridge and gossip, even about 'secret orders', not wisely but much too well. These sleek darlings, without ever having heard the whisper of a passing bullet, scorning mere mentions in despatches, became miraculously decorated with foreign Orders and Military Crosses, and great was the bitterness and discontent amongst the ordinary fighting soldier, wet to the hips in foul mud and generally living under conditions that no sanitary inspector would consider fit for a pig on an English farm. He called these *embusqués*, these spoilt darlings, by expressive epithets and growled at the nepotism in high places. I did not dream I was so soon to join the pampered darlings in security behind the lines.

In the trenches at Klein Zillebeke I received a message from Headquarters that I was about to be sent back to command some medical unit—probably an ambulance train—being considered too senior for regimental duty. Borrowing General Wilberforce's car, I went direct from the trenches to G.H.Q. at St. Omer to protest. After so much excitement and movement and with such a good

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regiment, a backwater like the charge of an ambulance train sounded deadly. Captain Maugham, who had been continuously in medical charge of the 18th Hussars, had a better claim for the comparative rest of an ambulance train, not having had, like myself, a spell at home because of a trifling wound. He certainly looked as if he needed a rest. I persuaded him to come with me to St. Omer. But G.H.Q. would not listen to any suggestion that he, not I, should take command of the train. Olympus in the person of Major-General Burtchaell had apparently decided that the most senior and not the most wearied were those to be sent to safety and comfort. Accordingly, on the second day of the battle of Neuve Chapelle I had to say good-bye to the 4th Dragoon Guards and the 2nd Cavalry Brigade.

The relations of a doctor to the officers and men of the unit he serves with are necessarily intimate. Including Field and Horse batteries, I have served in war and peace with more than thirty different units in the Army. I have been happy with all of them, but never left any unit with such regret as I did the 4th. One exception had been a Regular battalion of the Royal Welch Fusiliers; they eventually got into hot water for their behaviour to Indians. Oddly enough, it was this regiment which ten years later Mr. Robert Graves, in his book *Good-bye to All That*, rather distinguishes for its insolence to himself and other junior and 'temporary' officers, its outspoken contempt for other Army units. When I had known it, its attitude to other Europeans, civil and military, had been ludicrously uncivil. As for its treatment of Indians . . . but that's another story.

I never met the 4th Dragoons again. Sometimes in some desolate spot I would come across dug-outs which they had evidently occupied during one of our abortive attempts to break through the German lines.

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Many of the Regiment were dead or crippled. I was one of the few left practically unscathed. Now I was to go to command a unit that was not in existence when the War broke out and of which I knew nothing, to retire into safety and comparative comfort, leaving behind those who were really winning the War by the endurance of the danger and hardship, the squalor and brutality, the miseries and horror of the front line.

Looking back on my service with the Regiment I knew that I had in reality done very little; I could scarcely have done less.

Sometimes, in those earlier months, well-mounted and feeling guiltily at ease when all the rest were dashing hither and thither, I had hunted for missing transport or taken messages to units on our flanks in an attempt to equalize my unfairly small burden, and they had been so appreciative. Englishmen, who at times seem to take a pride in being sarcastic and cynical, can yet, if they like, be so kind—even to one another.

Anyway, I know I hated saying good-bye. Had I been offered the choice of forfeiting my rank and professional status and remaining with them to be but a private soldier once again, I believe I could not have refused.

‘Orders to report at Rouen’. Rouen sounded almost as remote from the War as England, remote geographically and psychologically.

In the area behind the trenches stretching back from Poperinghe, Hazebrouck, Rouen, and Havre, I found the change in the mental atmosphere remarkable. At the Front there had been at the outset good fellowship, even affection, certainly very little jealousy amongst regimental officers. How absurd to feel jealous of a man whose blood might be splashed over you by a bursting shell or grenade an hour or two afterwards! Men who do not

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expect to live long and who face death together continuously can harbour no lasting ill-will. Intense nervous irritation there was sometimes, but envy was non-existent; the motive for it absent. What did it matter if X was mentioned in despatches or got a V.C. when you might find him a day or two later huddled in a corner of the trench, ashen-grey and moaning, with his thigh pulped or his stomach gashed open. And there were no women to raise jealousy for favours of another kind. But behind the trenches the perennial causes of rivalry and jealousy were still more or less active. The presence of women of all sorts and conditions, titled women, nursing sisters, and drivers of cars, some on the look-out for adventures romantic or otherwise, others with more definite social ambitions or with an eye for a good marriage, revived the snobbish conventions of pre-War days. Also, the desire for decorations that might at the Front have been only personal vanity increased amongst officers behind the line because of solid ambitions founded on their greater expectation of survival and the consequent chance of permanent promotion and a higher pension.

Going down to Rouen I shared a carriage with a Veterinary Major who had recently been appointed to a Headquarters of one of the new corps. He was a most agreeable little man, cheerful and companionable, and seemed thoroughly pleased with the social possibilities of his new appointment.

'Our mess,' he proudly confided to me, 'is always full of real nobs, simply stinks of duchesses.' Poor fellow, I daresay it did! The fall from the sublime to the ridiculous can be amusing—a decline in time of war from the essentials of a life-and-death struggle to the trivial and snobbish, rather less so.

With each stage backwards towards the Base and the shores of old England there was an increase of the ten-

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dency to an irritable form of unreasoning obstruction, a crabbing kind of jealousy. Commandants of rest camps and other back area units, Town Majors, and so forth, harried the fighting man who came back for a brief respite with all sorts of restrictions and obligations. How scathing some of them could be about X or Y's inefficiency; they were like sour spinsters who complain of unrequited merit. It was known that at the Bases were accumulating all the displaced incompetents of the front area sent back to rusticate—'*dégommé*', as the French say; *Stellenbosched* as we had called it in South Africa—so each fresh incompetent arrived in a state of prickly ill-temper. As one left the War behind there was also more pomposity and more fussy 'discipline'. The A.P.M. in Piccadilly was, we were told, very fussy about the exact shade of shirt collars! And the War propaganda increased in intensity step by step until, having passed Whitehall, you reached the very apotheosis of venomous war-hatred in the old women of both sexes comfortably seated in arm-chairs in mansions in the Cromwell Road and Belgravia or in the boarding houses of Bayswater and Earl's Court. And of course there were the newspapers to fan these chained lions into a whiter fury of passionate vindictiveness, always an ugly spectacle.

I began to realize this Back-Area spirit on the platform at Abbeville station, where a Railway Staff Officer calmly informed me that R.A.M.C. meant 'Rob All My Comrades'. I had never before heard that stupid libel. There were catty insinuations concerning the inordinate immorality of the Sisters on the ambulance trains. Most of these good ladies were much too hardworked and also—with very great respect—rather too plain and elderly for that to be likely. The R.A.M.C. orderlies, I was told, 'went through' the packs and kit of wounded men and officers as a regular custom! A hospital orderly had been

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found, it was alleged, with eleven pairs of ten-guinea Zeiss field-glasses! Another had a large and valuable collection of various 'souvenirs' which he certainly had not picked up on the battlefield himself.

A terrible penalty should be meted out to anyone found pillaging the belongings, the stimulants or the food of wounded officers and men. It is a mean and despicable crime and still much too lightly punished. We English can be so extraordinarily tender with dishonesty, the most anti-social of all the vices and fairly prevalent in England, making up for this dangerous leniency to fraud and even to cruelty, by being unreasonably virulent and ruthless about stupid and silly sex indiscretions which do not undermine the whole foundations of social order and confidence as does widespread dishonesty and graft.

Yet no fair-minded man can say that the men of the R.A.M.C. are any less honest or trustworthy than the rest of the Army—rather that, generally speaking, they are in many respects more so. Obviously, the temptation to slackness and theft when you are attending, perhaps alone and under war conditions, to badly wounded and half-unconscious officers and men whose pockets and haversacks are often full of valuables and coveted souvenirs, is, for an ordinary private soldier, considerable. The R.A.M.C. orderly is the only private soldier in the Army whose unsupervised responsibilities may at any time be similar to an officer's, and whose temptations, considering his rank and education, may be even greater.

CHAPTER XIX

'SAFETY FIRST'

Often when my train was garaged for twenty-four hours or more at Sotteville near Rouen I used to meet Moxon, a 'dug-out' regular officer, who had some Railway Staff billet there. Sometimes we would row across the Seine and go for long country walks on the far side. More often, seated in the derelict signal box that did duty for his office, we used to exchange grouses about the War. Moxon, a burly individual with a heavy white face, a square jaw, a tumbled mass of black hair and shoulders like an ox, had three grievances—complexes I suppose I should say—Americans, Jews and money-lenders. He certainly was not a pro-German, but three months wrangling with the French railway officials and living in this draughty cabin that stood up like an island amidst a network of railway lines had not improved his temper or his opinion of the French. Outside, amidst a waste of sidings, half a dozen antique and decrepit French locomotives snorted and panted all day long, 'fly-shunting' an endless series of battered and diminutive goods wagons. A hideous banging, jarring and whistling mixed up with the sharp cries of the pointsmen began about 5 a.m., and did not cease until after dark. Our conversations would be punctuated by Moxon suddenly leaping up, flinging open the window and bellowing:

'Oh, for God's sake, stop that bloody whistling right opposite my office! Can't you take your blasted machine

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somewhere else and let it whistle?’ The French *machinistes* on the footplate would shrug their shoulders and grin; one of them would significantly tap his forehead—the mad ill-controlled explosive English! Sometimes, as a mark of their unconcern, they would dismount from their ‘machines’ and urinate against the wall of Moxon’s office.

The first time I met Moxon the *Lusitania* had just been sunk. Moxon had a brother in New York and told me he heard that the German Ambassador there had warned American passengers that as the *Lusitania* was taking over munitions and many intending recruits for the British Army she ran the risk of being torpedoed by German submarines. He rubbed his hands gleefully at the affair, which made me rather indignant. I said that I did not in any case consider the Germans had a right to sink a passenger ship.

‘No! But at least they have scuppered some of those fat Americans who come over here to swagger with their almighty dollar. They are corrupting Europe with their “get rich quick”.’

‘Anyway, Moxon, the mere effect of the Americans joining in with us would seriously dishearten the Boche.’

‘Rot, my dear boy! But as far as that goes, they’ll probably come in sooner or later just to see we pay them for the munitions they are sending over. They are only moneylenders. It is disgusting to think that we English have also become moneylenders. Simply usurers! By God! When I was in India I used to kick the *shroffs* and other moneylenders off the steps of my bungalow. They used to come up whining once a month with some fantastic story about my owing them some interest! But now we English have become just like those *shroffs*—Shylocks, lending money to the Argentine and Russia

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and Brazil and God knows who! That’s not honest trading. Anyway, why on earth don’t we let these French and Russians and Germans fight things out amongst themselves. Just *look* at *those* Frenchmen!’ He pointed at some men loafing about outside on the railway lines. ‘All their coal trucks look as if they were dropping to pieces, and their engines are tied up with string. What is the good of trying to help people like them? Never mind! I am sick of talking about this rotten war. Let’s adjourn for a drink.’

Which we did.

The last time I saw Moxon the Americans *had* come in, and he was more angry with them than ever. I really think it gave him a pain when he saw the Stars and Stripes floating over the big café with the glass front facing the river at Rouen (I think it was called the Café Victor) where the Allied officers used to congregate.

Safety First! But is it really worth first place? It was certainly safe enough on those improvised ambulance trains, but the months of endless jolting, lack of exercise, irregular meals, and broken nights were bad for nerves, temper, and digestion. I soon began to pester G.H.Q. with applications to return to a Division. The permanent way, besides being bumpy, was getting more and more foul and neglected, and the crew suffered in health. Some of the iron vans (*fourgons*) used for stretcher cases were almost without springs, the wounded, lying on the floor, suffering terribly from the jarring; even those lying on the seats in the ordinary carriages, rather antiquated and with worn springs, were not much better off.

There was a real danger in sending any badly wounded man by rail, especially serious wounds of the head and body. When later the first two of the new ambulance trains arrived, composed of well-sprung and specially

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constructed carriages, the risk was still considerable, for the branch lines, probably never very well laid, had deteriorated rapidly with the constant heavy traffic; a journey over them in ordinary railway carriages only too often resulted in accelerating or even definitely causing the death of the wounded.

The earlier ambulance trains were a jumble of odds and ends of rolling stock of different weights and patterns, and our engine drivers were either incompetent French reservists or pensioners who had almost forgotten their craft and were much flustered by the strange conditions, mismanaging the jerky brakes that varied in type and pressure, while the buffer springs were uncoiled and the carriages unwarmed.

April, 1915, was unusually bleak, and in the steel brake vans the wounded suffered especially badly from the cold on their way down to Boulogne. The effect of the chill draught caused by the progress of the train on men already weak and numb from loss of blood was deplorable. The orderlies and Sisters on the train had to clamber from carriage to carriage along the footboards while the train was in motion, carrying hot bottles, jugs of hot soup, and syringes of morphine. Many times one of the crew or a nursing sister most definitely risked their lives, getting overtaken on the running boards by a tunnel when their arms were full of blankets. On some of the older carriages the running boards were not even continuous, or the gap between two carriages or trucks was almost too great to be sprung across while the train was in motion; so one way or another most of us had near escapes. The nursing sisters who worked on those improvised trains in the earlier months certainly deserved more kudos than most of them got. Later on, the wounded complained of the stuffiness of the carriages: the many exhausting delays in sidings, with the sun beat-

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ing down on the roof of the train, making conditions in the crowded carriages almost insupportable.

Very early in 1915 when the Cavalry Division was resting, Headquarters being at the Abbaye de Woestine near St. Omer, the Duchess of Sutherland had asked me to accompany her on a tour of the Herzelee area. We motored round to find some suitable buildings quite close to the front line which could be turned into special hospitals for men seriously wounded in the head or body and obviously quite unfit to be jolted about in trains and ambulances. The 'war risk' to the wounded in this area was less than the long cold journey back through St. Omer to Boulogne. Eventually we found some buildings we thought suitable. But apparently G.H.Q. was then too much occupied with other matters, for the waste of life due to the absence of special hospitals near the front for wounded absolutely unfit for a longish journey continued for many months.

The tale of death continued even on the ambulance train. Many, especially those with head wounds, died an hour or two after being put on board, their bodies being put off at St. Omer. On one occasion I remember that no less than six corpses were unloaded there. Sometimes the twenty-odd miles between Poperinghe and St. Omer took four or five hours. It was mortifying that many who had been carefully dressed and revived at the Casualty Clearing Station were being made worse again on our train in spite of all we could do. Amongst the many I remember with head wounds whose condition was, one felt, being aggravated by the train journey, was Lord Desborough's son, who complained of pain in the wound and severe headache. Owing to the jolting we had to allow him to sit up because he found the pain more en-

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durable in that position, though the other officers in the carriage with him, one of whom I think was Lord Winchester and another one of the Duke of Northumberland's family, were naturally anxious that he should lie down. He looked acutely ill when we put him out at Boulogne; it was sad but not surprising to hear a day or two afterwards that he had not survived.

The 'Great' War had been the first in which the ferocity had been such that in full view of both sides the wounded had had to lie for days in the heat and rain without attention. The usual daily truce to collect the wounded and bury the dead, mutually arranged as it had been in most other wars, was scoffed at. In this respect, at least, we had progressed backwards. Some of our most terrible journeys were those in which we brought back from the Front trainloads of wounded men, many of whom had been lying out in no-man's-land in the heat for several days. In many of these cases the flies had laid their eggs in the open wounds and gas-gangrene had supervened, causing such a terrible stench that even the Sisters and nursing orderlies would vomit after handling these poor victims in their living death. So penetrating and foul was the odour that by the time we reached Boulogne the whole train stank and the smell would hang about the carriages for a day or two even after they had been cleaned.

There was something unforgettable in those rank odours of disease. Our sense of smell is said to be one of the oldest, the most primitive, of our senses, the sense most effectually reminiscent.

I remember particularly one day when Boulogne sweltered in a heat wave. For about the eighth time that week I had emptied out at the town station a trainload of

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wounded from the Ypres sector. The packed carriages had disgorged their mutilated cannon fodder—stretcher cases of poison gas, amputations, gas-gangrene, and head wounds, as well as some hundreds of ‘sitting’ cases. The unmistakable smell of septic wounds, unwashed bodies and sweat-soaked khaki still hung about the platforms and empty carriages. As I stood watching the last stretcher-parties moving slowly down the platform towards the ambulances drawn up in the station yard, something—it may have been the unwholesome acrid smell from the train—transported my thoughts.

It was not July, 1915, but July, 1901. I was a Guy’s student again doing extern duty in the Borough, attending midwifery cases in Neckinger, a sordid slum-island in Bermondsey. Outside in the shabby court the heated air quivered; odours of hops, tanneries, horse dung, and wood pavement inextricably blended. The mean tumble-down dwelling I was in buzzed with flies, while the frowsy smell of unclean bedding was everywhere; here and there the familiar chains of brown vermin crawled from the loose and half-rotten skirting boards upwards on to the greasy walls. A thin wailing sound was coming down the steep rickety staircase from a room above—one of the spate of unwanted infants which plague the slums and which I had helped to bring into the world, wondering at the time whether the snuffling, puling bundle of misery would not have done better to have got itself born in an African jungle.

‘This makes fifteen, and I’ve buried nine, sir,’ the mother had said. The midwife, nodding confidentially at me, had suggested a bootlace or lying the unwanted one face downwards on a blanket. Full of youthful rigidity and righteousness I had sternly threatened her with the coroner if the child was not alive the next day.

On the point of leaving, I was appealed to by someone

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in one of the downstairs rooms. A woman was lying there on a bed composed of old potato sacks covered with a very dirty cotton sheet. She was obviously in an advanced state of pregnancy, sitting up in bed at intervals and coughing her very soul out. A high temperature (my stethoscope clapped to the dry rough skin of her chest confirmed what she could tell me of her illness between the fits of coughing), double miliary tuberculosis of both lungs—what the novelettes call 'galloping' consumption—aggravated and accelerated by the strain of pregnancy. Besides the bed, an empty packing case, and a chipped and very greasy enamel basin there seemed to be nothing in the horribly stuffy little room. The grimy window-frames were simply swarming with flies—anticipatory! I tried to open the window—nailed up. She was obviously without friends, so in a grubby fly-blown little shop nearby I got her a loaf and a can of milk. I gave her a hospital card, feeling it would be nearly useless; she was beyond anything hospitals could do, and even if there should be a maternity bed available for an acute tuberculosis case, who was going to take her to the hospital?

The other tenants in the house seemed to know very little about her except that her husband, a casual labourer in the London docks, had been missing for weeks; drowned, it was feared. 'Must have walked the plank with too much beer on board,' one man suggested.

The preparatory whistle from my train, about to back out, brought me back with a start to France. So . . . ! amidst all the patriotic and picturesque emotion about 'wounded heroes' one had forgotten that there were others desolate. It was not only soldiers who lay mortally 'wounded' and alone in 'no-man's-land'.

As we passed through the French countryside daily in

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our train there was time for us to notice the reckless waste going on on all sides. In one railway siding my crew discovered a sack containing over sixty unopened tins of perfectly good chicken and tongue, which had been thrown into an incinerator to save somebody the trouble of carrying them to a store about a quarter of a mile away. Abandoned near the railway line were hundreds of good blankets and haversacks and equipment of all kinds. There was often a real excuse for waste in the heavily shelled area near the front line, but the waste in the Back Area could only have been due to sheer carelessness and laziness.

Our squandermania became at times almost ludicrous. We heard that at one casualty clearing station, which King George and the Headquarters Staff of our Armies in France were to inspect, it was desired that all the different contrivances in the unit should be functioning gaily at the time of inspection. At the last moment it was discovered that one of the incinerators was no longer burning, there being presumably no more rubbish to burn; so a bale of perfectly good uniforms, on which a can of paraffin had been emptied, was hastily thrown into the incinerator and set alight. But the idiot who threw it in forgot to cut the stout cord with which the Army Clothing Factory had thoughtfully done it up. The King—one of my naval brothers had served in the same ship with him—was like most naval officers quite capable of seeing a good deal he was not intended to see. Deeply interested he approached the incinerator and remarked that some of the trousers which were burning had still got the creases in them.

‘But they are dangerously infected, yur Majesty,’ hastily invented the Irish doctor who was commanding the unit.

‘Are they?’ said the King, incredulously, approaching

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a step nearer to the incinerator, while the circle of gilded staff around him grew more and more uncomfortable.

'Look out! Look out! Come back, soire!' cried the now desperate Irishman, seizing the tails of the King's military frockcoat. 'Yur Majesty, they're full of loice!'

We were told that this Irish doctor received a C.M.G. for his presence of mind, followed by immediate dismissal to the Base for incompetence.

CHAPTER XX

ECCENTRICITY . . . AND . . . DESOLATION

Importunity succeeded. Almost with a sense of guilt, having had more than three months of safety in a train, I was returning once more to the War to command a Field Ambulance in one of the new Army Divisions in the Bethune area; a Light Infantry Division to be linked up with the Guards in the 14th Corps, as one of the most efficient of a select band of so-called Storm Divisions.

The officer to whom I reported at Divisional Headquarters, the Director of Medical Services, a man whom I only knew officially, was one for whom his own corps had a great respect not unmingled with fear. A strict disciplinarian and a very well read, intelligent and capable man, Colonel F. had been the Senior Professor of Hygiene at the London Staff College; but unlike many scientists he was a big, well-groomed, upright man—terse, soldierly, and ruthlessly direct, exacting a very high standard of both medical and military efficiency. Woe to the sloven, the 'eyewasher', the slacker or the ignoramus who served under him.

'You are', he said briskly as he shook hands, 'to take over a unit which the Divisional Commander and I consider easily the worst and most troublesome in the whole Division—probably in the whole Army. I expect you to make it one of the best. It has all along been giving Headquarters more worry and causing more correspondence than all the other units in the Division. Look at

ECCENTRICITY . . . AND . . . DESOLATION this.' He lifted a tray of correspondence. 'All complaints about your new command! The Colonel who now commands it, senior to you by several years, is being relieved and sent down to the Base. You will take over his Command forthwith. Some of the officers of your unit aren't really too bad, only want pulling together, and I daresay the men are all right; but the discipline is simply deplorable, the organization non-existent, and performance of the unit's duties is simply hopeless!'

I gathered that the personnel of my new command had been largely made up from the leavings and rejections of several other units, being one of the last of the medical units of Kitchener's armies to be scraped together.

'Go and see what you can make of it. Make a success of it or I shall break you as I have broken Colonel Blank. Now you've no time to waste. Your unit has never yet heard a gun fired, and the Division will be in one of the biggest fights of the War within a week or two. If you fail then you'll let the whole Division down; and frankly, I never forgive or forget those who let me down!'

That was cheering. I asked for some details about the officers of the unit.

'Oh, a mixed lot! You're the only Regular, so it'll have to be a one-man show, anyway until you've found whom you can trust; and judging by the trouble we've had recently, I shouldn't be in a hurry to trust any of them. One or two I think may become quite useful—Territorials, Special Reservists, or New Army; you've got all sorts. I am told one of them, a young Scotsman, temporarily commanded the unit in England before Blank was sent to them; he naturally resents being passed over a second time for an Englishman, as it is very largely a Scots ambulance. They are most of them Scotsmen and clannish, and don't like Regulars, especially incompetent

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English Regulars, being shoved in to command them. But G.H.Q. consider that field ambulances are too complicated units for amateurs; and many of these New Army fellows have got peculiar and hazy ideas concerning organization, administration, and discipline. Anyway, you've got to take it over! Now get off to it—and for God's sake don't give me any more bother with it! I've more than enough to do up here.'

So my luck apparently was out.

As it happened, things did not turn out as badly as I feared. Eventually, after much worry and tribulation, and more than enough hard work, we were able to satisfy even the most exacting of the Brass Hats.

Amongst the medical officers of the 14th Corps was a hard-working but somewhat over-zealous youngster whose name shall be Mackenzie. Mackenzie, though so well-meaning, was furtive in his manner, most elusive in his movements, and had an abnormal disregard for his appearance, combined with an extraordinary simplicity of mind and a devouring curiosity.

Habitually he forgot to shave and brush his hair. It was a rare occasion when he had not three or four days growth on his chin. Having lost his own cap during his numerous excursions into no-man's-land—where he searched for German fuses, German helmets, and other souvenirs—he had appropriated a derelict cap many sizes too small for him. Perched on his head like a pork pie, it gave to his rather childish face a curious look of astonishment and expectancy. The remainder of his uniform, or rather of what had once been uniform, it is difficult to describe. Bits of string frequently took the place of buttons. Being one of the type who simply revelled in the unconventionality and the roughness and

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hardships of war, he was usually greasy and grimy from head to foot.

One day, Mackenzie's battalion being in reserve, he decided, though Army Orders forbade it, to take a brisk walk to another and distant part of the line for a little change of air. A mile or two from the Headquarters of his regiment he became intensely interested in a crew serving a gun, whose target was a building on the skyline which, it was suspected, the Germans were using as an observation post. Mackenzie installed himself behind a small shed in order to be a little protected from the splinters of any shell which the Germans might be sending over in reply. Ensconced in this position he popped his head out at intervals to watch the effects of our fire.

The sergeant in charge of the gun crew having watched the stealthy movements of this dishevelled individual for some minutes, advanced sternly towards him, revolver in hand.

'Bravo, sergeant!' said Mackenzie brightly. 'I say, you've been making excellent shooting!'

'And 'oo the 'ell might you be?'

'Me? Oh, I'm Mackenzie, you know, attached to the 25th King's Royal Rifles.'

'What Division and what Corps?' the sergeant demanded. Mackenzie told him. 'Then what the 'ell are you doin' 'idin' be'ind that shed two miles out of your Divisional area watching our shootin'?'

Mackenzie said he had come for a walk, but insisted that he was always interested in the excellent practice made by the British Artillery.

'Yes, and our practice with revolvers isn't too bad either. You will be good enough to take another little walk in front of me until I tells you to stop; our A.P.M. takes care of the likes of you.'

Mackenzie, quite undisturbed, made himself comfort-

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able in the dug-out in which the sergeant confined him. Lighting his pipe he even offered the sentry who stood over him with a loaded rifle some tobacco, an offer refused with the usual Army adjective, followed by certain other remarks not entirely complimentary to the temperamental eccentricities and sexual enjoyments of the Teutonic race in general and spies in particular.

Presently—over the telephone—an irritable A.P.M. was demanding from the O.C. of the 25th King's Royal Rifles whether an unkempt, dishevelled, and mud-bespattered individual, some of whose buttons had been replaced by string and whose cap had evidently been borrowed, and who had several days growth on his chin—found wandering and observing gunfire miles from the Division—could possibly be his battalion doctor. An officer had accordingly to be sent from the battalion to identify Mackenzie, who came back full of his adventure, smiling at having pulled the leg of the Royal Field Artillery so badly.

Shortly afterwards, home on short leave, Mackenzie fell under the suspicion of the civil police. His wife had recently but somewhat reluctantly had a baby. Attending to her in their villa at Teddington, Mackenzie had had a serious accident with a Primus stove in the small hours, and gallantly flung it all alight out of a window. Mistaking it for a bomb, the neighbourhood had been much disturbed, and one of the next-door maids had since become hysterical. One way and another, the eccentricities of the Mackenzie ménage, and the new-born infant's constant fretfulness, had annoyed their neighbours; there had even been bitter words over the palings. Then one day the fretfulness suddenly ceased. Now Mackenzie had been seen furtively leaving the villa at an unearthly hour for the river bank with a black bag, from which proceeded a faint wailing noise, and later had

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been noticed returning, light-heartedly swinging an obviously empty bag. Some days later a child's body was found in the river at Brentford. The gossip of the neighbours' servants concerning the black bag incident induced the police to make some 'discreet' enquiries; the child, so Mackenzie told the police, had been sent to its grandmother at Hastings. Unfortunately, when asked for the address he had carelessly stated it was at St. Leonard's, and the policeman there, though it was within a mile of Hastings, reported that the address given was fictitious.

Meanwhile Mackenzie had hired a punt and accompanied by his wife had been investigating some swans' nests higher up the Thames. A lock-keeper had warned him repeatedly that he was trespassing, which naturally only added fresh zest to his investigations. He had been caught again just as he had become involved in a scuffle with an irate male swan; in the course of this battle-royal Mackenzie had lost his balance and his straw hat. (Regulations, it may be added, did not permit a temporary officer to wear plain clothes on leave; but regulations, of course, meant nothing whatever to Mackenzie.) After having his name and address taken for repeated trespass he had again returned to the swannery to recover his straw hat. Being a third time caught he had, still dripping wet, to accompany a policeman to the police station so that his name and address might be verified by reference to the police at Teddington. It then transpired that the police there desired to have a further interview with him concerning his child. He eventually cleared himself of suspicion of the infanticide of anything but kittens; also of the charge of trespass with intent to steal swans' eggs; but succeeded, as he gleefully reminded his unit on return, in having had four days extra leave in order to appear in court.

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On the next occasion when he was granted short leave to England he rendered himself unpopular in a way quite peculiar to himself. On the crowded homeward-bound leave train the other officers wedged in beside him discovered there was a most unpleasant smell of bad meat in the carriage, which Mackenzie was able to explain by producing from his haversack the hand of a dead German which he had found some days before in no-man's-land and was taking home as a souvenir. Obligated by the others, he very reluctantly threw the hand out of the window, but further disgusted his companions by making a substantial meal from ham sandwiches and Marie biscuits which he had apparently been carrying in the very same haversack. Nor was this all. Mackenzie was a singularly untidy smoker, fragments of burning tobacco frequently falling from his pipe. Later on during the same journey, he produced from one of his pockets a large grey wad of German gun-cotton which he had found and was also apparently taking home as a souvenir. The almost speechless fury of his fellow travellers as he insisted on explaining with his lighted pipe in his mouth just where he had found the gun-cotton can be imagined.

Mackenzie was certainly a brave man, inconsequent to a degree and irresponsibly reckless. Going round the trenches of his battalion he would insist in all sincerity and innocence on stopping the whole party he was conducting at certain exposed points in order to explain elaborately to them that, at that precise hour, that particular spot was regularly machine-gunned. His observations were uncannily accurate. On more than one occasion the swish-swish-swish of machine-gun bullets coming over just as he finished his lengthy explanation caused certain senior administrative officers who were with us, some of whom very rarely visited the front line, to bound up into the air in indignant astonishment.

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He had one trouble; he craved for some distinction—a Military Cross, a mention in despatches, or something of the sort.

'The Regiment', he complained, 'only think you are a hell of a fine doctor provided you amputate or do some big abdominal operation right up in the trenches and under fire. Of course,' he continued, 'I know it's criminal to operate anywhere within five miles of the front line if it can be avoided, because the conditions are so foul you are bound to infect your operation wound hopelessly and so make a second amputation necessary—that is if the man isn't already dead from gas-gangrene. But regimental officers think their doctor ought always to be "doing things", big things! If you don't "do" an amputation or two they think you are afraid or don't know how to do one. Besides,' he added cheerfully, 'you know you really save a man's life if you take off an arm or leg that possibly might have been saved; because then your patient will be certain to be kept safe and sound in England; otherwise he's fairly certain to come out again and eventually get killed. So you are not only doing him a good turn but will probably get an M.C. yourself for your wonderful "coolness in operating under fire".'

It was a waste of breath arguing with him, and there were too many other things to think about.

I do not think he got seriously wounded in the War. His amazing inconsequence was almost an asset to the Germans, who, if they could have watched his eccentricities, would have taken special pains to see he was not hurt.

The dreariness of the rather sordid rest billets near Poperinghe was sometimes relieved by 'regrettable incidents'. Indignant Flemish farmers would accuse some of the men of theft—stealing eggs was a favourite exploit.

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The culprit, with the hulking, red-faced and suspicious farmer as a witness, would explain that he had been passing innocently behind a fence and, noticing a small hole in the fence near the ground, had out of simple curiosity put his hand therein; whereupon, it seemed, a hen had incontinently and most considerately—it being tea-time—laid an egg into his hand. Much astonished, he had been, he insisted, on his way with the egg still warm in his hand to deliver it to the Flemish farmer, when the latter had overtaken him—‘and horrible things he said, sir, about you and all us English! I believe this here farmer, sir, is a German spy!’

‘But why were you running, Private Brown?’

‘I was a little surprised at the incident myself, sir, and a little confused and only anxious that the egg should be still warm as a proof it was an accident.’

This little history would have to be laboriously translated into Flemish to the enraged farmer, who would retire muttering fearful oaths into his beard concerning wars in general and the piratical habits of the English in particular.

Fear, especially on the part of the not too popular Staff Officer also had its humorous side. One of them, apparently quite unaccustomed to gunfire, flung himself hastily into a dung-pit on hearing a loud explosion just behind; but it happened it was only one of our own guns firing. We were pleased about this and felt superior: the difference in sound between the arrival and explosion of an enemy shell, and of one of our own leaving the muzzle, being to most of us only too familiar. But critics of the Staff forgot that it is far less trying to the nerves to *live up* in the front line with deep dug-outs handy, where the danger there has become a kind of routine, and where one is up to all the tricks of the enemy and his ‘time

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table' and well acquainted with the geography of the trenches, than to have to pay repeated visits *from* a peaceful area to the danger zone, equally ignorant as to which is the safer trench to use at any particular hour, what may be the habits and temper of the particular German regiments opposite you as regards firing, and which point in particular is being watched by their machine-gunners and sharpshooters. Going up to a Battalion or Brigade Headquarters by what one imagined to be a comparatively safe route and a supposedly quiet hour, one would be greeted with angry reproaches.

'Why the devil do you come up at this unholy hour of the day and across country too! Don't you know the Bavarians have taken to strafing that trench at eleven? Are you a suicide-merchant or do you *want* to get *our* Headquarters shelled again?'

Having to walk up alone almost daily to the front line was unpleasant; once there oneself, there was a certain humour in noting the anxious faces of those arriving.

We assured everyone, as part of the war propaganda, that the Germans were neither genial nor generous and had no real sense of sportsmanship and humour. But was this true? An old friend, Captain W., a fine international rugby forward, genial, good-natured, rotund and always smiling, beloved by men—but not very popular with women; he would always pull their legs—was captured by the Germans under circumstances they considered suspicious, but which were entirely due to the nature of W.'s duties. He was certainly not a spy, being in fact the sort of man who would, I believe, have refused to spy even for the sake of his country. But the Germans were distrustful of his assurances, so a revolver was pressed against his temple while a couple of bayonets gently prodded his by no means slim stomach to refresh

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his memory and accelerate his replies to their numerous questions. Jumbo, as he was usually called, declared to me afterwards that he was really very frightened, 'sweating with terror'. But the Germans fortunately mistook the very wrinkled condition of his fat face for intense amusement. So delighted were their officers with his supposed coolness and sense of humour under such an ordeal that they made him forthwith their regimental mascot, insisted on his messing with them, and filling him up with champagne. After an interval they put him into a French dogcart to drive back in the direction in which the British were retreating. He left amidst cheers and ironical shouts from his hosts to the effect that he would certainly be court-martialled on his return to the British lines for 'desertion'. His smiles when he appeared again to his astonished regiment must have been worth seeing.

We had our own humorists in the Division and one of the best troops of pierrots and 'pierrettes' in the Army—the Verey Lights—skilfully directed by G., who had a most exacting and rather explosive martinet for his General. This General had caused to be erected an enormous mound of earth and barbed wire as a strong point on which he apparently intended to rally in some desperate battle the whole of the British Army. His brigade worked for weeks at this erection and within easy range of German sharpshooters. Almost literally, in the building of this young mountain the ground around had been dyed red with the blood of the men and far too many of the really keen, dependable and efficient younger officers—most of them old Wykehamists or Etonians—of G.'s regiment. The Regiment—indeed the whole Brigade—were heartily sick of this strong point which, with its concealed machine-guns and its great size, could have held out for some time against a

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mass attack or even against heavy artillery. It would almost have needed an earthquake to shift it. The Brigadier, a big man, arrived one morning in the trenches more than usually irritable and impatient and began fault-finding. Everything was all wrong, including G., whose suave, deferential but persistent explanations the General kept on interrupting. G. had great pluck, besides a sense of humour, and insisted to the concern of all around on arguing each point, several times flatly contradicting this enraged monster in a General's uniform. The General stormed, raved, cursed and spluttered, emphasizing his denunciation of G.'s 'damned impertinences' by beating furiously with his stick at one of the massive angles of his famous strong point that towered above them.

'One moment, sir,' said G. with an air of meek anxiety, deferentially interrupting this flow of fire and brimstone; and stooping down, he picked up a large divot of turf which the General's fury had displaced. 'Your fort, sir, I think!' said he, brightly and pleasantly, presenting the piece of turf to his enraged superior as if it had been a golf ball. So amazed was the G.O.C. at this pleasantry that he became for a moment quite white and speechless. Then, growing suddenly calm, he placed G. under arrest for 'contumacy and insolence'. But G., like the jackdaw of Rheims, never looked any the worse afterwards. Obliterated by the excitements of some impending battle the court-martial, if it was ever summoned, either did not assemble or its proceedings were quashed. It was one of the compensations of being in the front line that any threatened punishment was so much less to be dreaded than the accuracy of the German sharpshooters. It was not much good threatening an insubordinate man that he would be shot at dawn, the Germans were quite likely to do that for you.

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There was something comic about the unreasoning pride of certain young officers in the New Army battalions of the more distinguished Regular regiments. They could outdo, in supercilious disdain, even the Regular officer they so carefully imitated.

Whatever faults the pre-War British officer may have had—however dull, wooden and unimaginative the average infantry officer may have been—he was a very agreeable and pleasant individual to meet and to live with when you met him on equal terms, when he did not suspect you of social inferiority or suffer from an inferiority complex himself.

Temporary officers sometimes complained, not entirely without reason, of the too superior attitude of patronage—the thinly-veiled contempt with which they were treated by a certain type of Regular. The officering of the English Army having been for generations mainly the privilege of a certain narrow caste, the Regular rather jealously resented the invasion of his profession by fellow Englishmen whom he was pleased to consider and call ‘outsiders’! All the more was it aggravating to find that this ‘outsider’, this temporary officer who had been perhaps only an assistant in a draper’s shop or in a grocery establishment, or a booking clerk at Birmingham Central Station, could become within a few months a very capable Staff officer and a most courageous and enterprising leader of men. Worse than this—perhaps it was the hardest pill of all to swallow—these budding Generals from suburban shops and the railway booking offices had never even been to a Public School! That in itself was very nearly a scandal! Often it was more a social snobbishness than regimental pride that was the trouble.

Our Division was considered fortunate in that it consisted largely of battalions of the Rifle Brigade and the

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60th Rifles and certain other Light Infantry regiments. In many cases the young officers of these battalions were drawn from much the same class as the Regular officers of the 60th Rifles and Rifle Brigade. Many were old Wykehamists; and Winchester School, from a social point of view, stands high in the list of Public Schools. For that very reason perhaps the snobs would specially want their sons to go there. Anyway, too evidently many of these youngsters considered themselves vastly superior to officers of other units in the same Division, with whom they shared the duties and dangers of the War. Were they not both old Wykehamists and for the time being also officers of the Rifles, a combination so imposing that surely almost everyone *ought* to be impressed! They were for the most part keen, brave, conscientious officers, upstanding and good to look at.

This hauteur and aloofness was, in its way, rather entertaining. Before the War I had had an elder brother in the Rifle Brigade, who would sometimes bring back his brother officers to lunch or dinner or take members of the family to exclusive and expensive luncheon tents at Ascot. But, quite obviously, even in those days some of his brother officers, though vastly pretentious, were not strictly speaking of patrician origin; many were but the sons or grandsons of wealthy tradesmen and prosperous solicitors. My father and two of my brothers were in the Navy, a 'senior' service sufficiently snobbish itself and one in which any claim of the Army to social pre-eminence was humorously ridiculed. My soldier brother and his fellow subalterns very young of course, and rather loftily self-conscious in their elaborately braided, dark green Rifle uniforms, were frequently a subject for suppressed mirth with my father, who as a naval veteran of the Crimean War period, the period of Army incompetence, confusion, and purchased commis-

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sions, regarded the Army as mainly a collection of dandified and incompetent noodles whom any really competent naval officer could 'knock into a cocked hat'. So when any of these young Wykehamist officers of the 200th Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles passed a senior officer of another unit with that superb disdain which only a *very* swollen-headed youngster of twenty can display, one only laughed at the absurdity of the situation. It didn't matter 'tuppence' in this war in which all of us might be killed or ruined, if they did or did not make a habit of passing within a yard not only without saluting but even studiously refusing to return the conventional morning greeting.

Sometimes, one of the subalterns of an 'ordinary' Line Regiment or one of the younger doctors would resent this extraordinary snobbishness. William of Wykeham's school has a motto: 'Manners makyth man'; but some of those who had been sent to Winchester evidently thought that 'badde manners makyth a *gentle*-man'!

In its way it was rather pathetic; aloofness and hauteur in the midst of a war, in which we English were fighting almost for our existence, made rather for friction and failure than for victory. Nearly every other day one or other of these excellent youngsters would be brought badly wounded into our Advanced Dressing Station, bleeding severely from some penetrating abdominal wound or with a shattered limb. Then my motor cyclist despatch-riders would have to be sent at full speed and often in the dark over shell-pitted roads to order motor ambulances or summon some surgeon specially qualified; or arrangements must be hastily made for their immediate reception and priority of operation at some crowded Casualty Clearing Station ten miles away and already blocked with wounded.

Should we operate on these lads at once in the Ad-

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vance Dressing Station where conditions for operating were by no means ideal? Was there any sign of the internal hæmorrhage stopping? Would tourniquet or ligature, ice or morphia or some other palliative measure reduce the necessity for immediate amputation or abdominal operation? Should we perhaps risk the loss of the young officer's life from gas-gangrene by giving him a few hours to recover from the first shock of the wound and the icy exposure and miles of jolting on the muddy stretcher on which he had arrived, before subjecting him to the second and even greater shock of amputation or laparotomy? Should we put him at once on the 'dangerous' or only on the 'serious' list in our telegram? A dozen questions must be answered and half a dozen messages sent, to save for his country, if we could, this youngster who only three hours before had thought it 'beneath the dignity of Winchester' *and* the Rifles, to answer the greeting of one or other of the young doctors, kind and competent enough, but almost diffidently 'middle-class', who were now beside him trying to save his life.

How came these young men to be so snobbish and so silly? Where could they have acquired this almost ludicrous class-pride in gratuitous rudeness, a rudeness the roughest French peasant could never be guilty of? Often their behaviour rather added if anything to dangers already sufficiently abundant. There were, for example, many specially nasty corners in the trenches, where the risk varied from day to day, sometimes from hour to hour. A German sharpshooter dressed up in bark well rubbed over with mud and concealed in some branches would be put up, for an hour or two, to pick off our officers, just where a communication trench joined the front line. Any observant person who had only been in the line for an hour or two, but who had just 'missed one', always made a point, if he got an opportunity, of giving a warn-

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ing that might save one or more English lives. In the front line it is inadvisable—even from the lowest motives—to snub or ignore anyone you pass. Yet one heard on more than one occasion of someone, who would in the exchange of a passing civility with a young officer of his own rank and age have almost certainly added some casual warning concerning a danger point, being deliberately ‘cut’, studiously ignored. Within a few hours this stupid meaningless pride had indirectly resulted in its young possessor meeting at this identical spot in the trenches a perhaps fatal but quite avoidable bullet.

It is said that the English are all snobs. Certainly as a boy I had been through something of the same phase myself, had actually learnt to be a snob, even been forbidden to play with three small friends when I was a child because their father was one of the proprietors of an hotel near Trafalgar Square. Officers’ sons, I was told, must not associate with ‘common folk who had a London accent’. Could one blame these keen courageous youngsters for being so wooden and snobbish, when it was partly the result of their school training and caste and class prejudice instilled into their young minds at the family breakfast table?

Surely our English priggishness is due to the lack of a sense of humour. We are so impressed with our own superiority in social position, manners and particularly in morals. One suspected that these prim-looking boys with their noses in the air secretly resented their arrival via their mother’s vagina on this diminutive planet as an affront on their personal dignity; that they served their King and Country with an equal condescension.

An Old Wykehamist, a tall athletic youth with a rucksack strapped to his back, looks over my shoulder and smiles indulgently as I write these lines near Chamonix. Proficient in at least one sport at school, and now a keen

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A world-wide revival of tribalism with passports and national tariffs was, it seems, to come after the War. In its own subtle way the Old Wykehamists' contempt for those who had been boarded and schooled elsewhere or belonged to a different regiment was a manifestation of that same parochial and tribal spirit, bound in the end to cripple the civilization which Europe had so laboriously built up, and for which we were supposed to be fighting.

In reality we were fighting to maintain English 'Kultur' against the Teutonic variety, and our 'Kultur' included these traditions of William of Wykeham's school at Winchester as well as the drab monotony of the less prosperous and much more numerous classes who caught the 8.15 every morning from Clapham Junction, who returned to those dreary suburban streets to clang those little painted iron gates behind them at six o'clock. Did these people have anything to make life worth while? Of course, there was love-making—inexpensive and easy, though much restricted by the killjoys in pulpits, in the Press and on platforms. Amidst the bushes on Clapham Common or Hampstead Heath two policemen are busy with flashlamps; there are two in order that one shall bring corroborative evidence of the other's accusations; they are spying about to see if one or other of these rather stifled, sex-starved, depressed-looking youths and girls

ECCENTRICITY . . . AND . . . DESOLATION are behaving 'indecently'. Poor souls! What a drab and joyless existence many of one's own compatriots were forced to lead by the killjoy tribe; that, too, was part of our English 'Kultur'. Was it *worth* fighting for, working for, living for or dying for? Was it so much better than the Teutonic 'Kultur' with its gymnasia, college duels, open-air swimming baths, music, uniforms and beer-gardens? The Good German God of whom the Kaiser had so loudly boasted was *at least* fond of beer and singing, would certainly not have allowed killjoy prohibitionists to deprive a Germanized England of cheerfulness.

As a Storm Division we alternated for nearly two and a half years between service in the Ypres Salient and on the Somme. Scarcely once during the whole of this period did we get a turn of duty in a quiet sector of the line.

The battlefield of the Somme in front of Norval, facing the German line between Sailly-Saillyselle and Le Transloy, was an area from which we were responsible for evacuating the wounded during most of the bitter winter of 1916-17. This hideous stretch of country—'a way of death betwixt the fires of hell'—was a veritable sea of mud and shell craters, the horizon marked by blackened tree stumps that showed up against the unceasing flashes of the guns.

All about this dreary plain was a litter of debris, tangled thickets of rusty barbed wire, and rows of hunched-up ragged bundles that had once been men. Near Les Boeufs numbers of dead lay about like shrivelled monkeys, their faces blackened and wizened from the sun of the previous autumn and long exposure to the winter frost and rains; their green-black, clawlike hands gripping their rusty bayonets even in death. Morval in particular was a very charnel house. Whole battalions had

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apparently been killed there with gas or machine-gun bullets, the corpses lying in rows, almost as evenly spaced as on parade. One huge group of three or four hundred, evidently mowed down or gassed during an attack, were wearing uniforms that had once been blue or greenish grey. Rank after rank of bodies, the corpses about five yards apart, and each rank nearly four hundred yards long, lay there; rows of huddled things, just bunches now of bones and blackened rags, long lines of wasted manhood in front of Morval.

The dismal drenching rains of those winter months had filled every crater to the brim. These pools of desolation, coloured according to the nature of the objects they covered and perhaps the kind of explosive that had burrowed out the original crater, were deep enough in many cases to have submerged an omnibus. A thick oily scum, green or red or brown or inky black, often covered the surface, from which protruded barbed wire and the swollen bodies of men and animals. Shrivelled hands—whitish of the newly-killed or greenish black of those killed at the beginning of the Somme encounter—seemed to clutch at the air, to warn or beckon others to these pools of death. Many men moving up in the darkness to the trenches after having been warmed up, and perhaps a bit 'sozzled' with their rum ration, stumbled face down into deep holes filled with liquid mud and, weighed down by their heavy packs, unnoticed in the din and darkness, were drowned in these pools and afterwards reported missing. Often only a steep and narrow ridge, crumbling and sinuous and scarcely a yard wide, separated one of these black pools from its greenish neighbour. The stench was insufferable, the squalor indescribable. Bodies that had been two or three times buried had been unearthed again by shell explosion. Heaps of severed and gangrenous limbs and clotted

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masses of corrupt and filthy hospital dressings marked the site of some abandoned advanced dressing station or aid post. Rotting socks, boots that still contained feet, rusted tins and shattered wheels, splintered duckboards and rusty rifles and hand-grenades littered the ground as far as eye could see. Unspeakably defiled with human excrement was also this ground, for hundreds and thousands of men, French, Germans or English, had lived and passed to and fro continually for months and years across this churned-up area and dwelt in this sodden wilderness, often without even the most primitive sanitation. The drizzle and the cold winter fog that hung night after night about this dreary waste was illumined by the flare of a thousand guns, the flash of their bursting shells, and the rocketing and ghostly glimmer of star-shells and Verey Lights.

The psychological effect of this hideous squalor and desolation combined with the nightly bursts of shelling, sudden attacks and gas alarms, and the bodily irritation of lice, the swarms of rats, brazen and impudent, that infested the dug-outs, even fouling our food with their excretion, was hard to measure at the time. If I had suffered in the early months of the War from strain and nerves and over-fatigue, I had not known it at the time. But the effect upon the mind of such squalid surroundings was far more consciously felt. The accumulating effect of strain or fear was more obvious when *combined with* squalor and with a *complete absence of movement* or sense of progress towards victory. One began to hate everything and everybody; the thought would recur that the world had become a vile discord, a place of torment, and that one would be far better out of it. Such a world was only made for vermin, and those who liked it were welcome to conquer Europe and remain in it. It surely would be better to be gone. Some did commit suicide,

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often by the method of deliberately taking unnecessary risks. More drowned their depression in whisky and rum.

On the Somme battlefield in particular, in the warm sunny days of September, 1916, the air grew heavy with the smell of putrefaction and thick with flies. Swarms such as Egypt never dreamed of, a plague no Pharaoh ever endured, poisoned the air. Large, sluggish and overfed, they were scarcely able to get up on the wing. The swarms kept together, as if conscious of their common origin, bred from the putrefaction of the same body. It was Life of a sort asserting itself, rising phoenix-like from the stench and miasma of unburied corpses.

There were other scenes on that battlefield more painful to describe. Men employed in 'cleaning up' some newly captured trench would find a comrade suffering from ghastly wounds and beaten and battered as well. Some hurried gasping explanation would come from the dying man. Although wounded he had perhaps refused to surrender, and even gone on attempting to kill his enemy, so his enemies had taken care to make his wound mortal by fresh thrusts and blows and terrible kicks about the body and head. Presently he can speak no longer of his torture, the froth grows thicker and more glutinous about his mouth, the breathing more spasmodic, his lips turn blue and his eyelids remain wide open over sightless eyes—eyes that stare ever upward, as if reproachfully, at the stars. But the men who heard his last dying words, his account of his own obstinate courage, his accusations against the enemy he tried with his last strength to kill, have moved on in the darkness—looking sullen and depressed, and vowing vengeance. They are now in another trench about fifty yards away. Two of them are crouching down and one of them is hitting something

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with the butt of his rifle, muttering something about
'We'll serve you as your lot served poor Bill'. The thing
they are hitting is a human being dressed in a different
coloured and very bloodstained uniform. He is wounded
in the knee and in the stomach so he cannot crawl away,
and they are beating in his skull with their boots and that
rifle. Presently another pair of sightless eyes gaze up-
wards at the same stars.

And someone—some embittered human ape—has
suggested that revenge is 'sweet'! Surely only sweet to
what is low and vindictive and human in us—not to the
simple-minded, unembittered animals from which the
human has 'descended'.

CHAPTER XXI

THE SHAPE THAT WALKETH AT NOONDAY

There were degrees of terror and shellshock that were themselves almost terrifying. Two other officers and myself and about seventy men were crouching one afternoon in a derelict shelter in the old brickyard near the Montauban crossroads; the whole area was being fairly heavily shelled, the Germans very much aware that a Brigade Headquarters, an ammunition dump, several gun-pits, and other attractive targets were thickly grouped at this point. Their short-range high explosive shells, coming in salvoes, were every now and then grazing the rickety top of the shelter, shaking down mud and bricks on us or exploding outside.

It was a depressing experience. The shelter we were in had only been a temporary one, constructed for the crews of the German artillery before they had been driven back. So the side facing their line was naturally quite unprotected from their fire. Long abandoned and out of repair, a single hit would have undoubtedly brought the half rotten 'roof' and tons of bricks and rubble down on top of us. We literally cowered in the mud, feeling quite helpless. Suddenly three men of the Brigade Signals appeared in the entrance carrying or rather dragging a Staff officer. Breathlessly they flung him inside and, shouting something about 'the General's orders', bolted out again. There was no chance of getting further ex-

THE SHAPE THAT WALKETH AT NOONDAY planations, for the piece of ground that lay between our shelter and the ladder leading underground to the good German dug-out which Brigade Headquarters had annexed was being well plastered with shell.

The Staff officer, a biggish man, somewhere between twenty-five and thirty, lay moaning on the ground. We could find no wound. In the din I tried to question him, thinking he had been seized with a fit or with acute internal pain. But he only moaned and jibbered and shook his head, grovelling on the ground at my feet with his face pressed to the muddy floor. While I questioned him we were suddenly assailed by a more than usually heavy burst of shelling. A perfect hurricane of whizzbangs, skimming just over the roof and bursting on a bank only about ten yards away, the splinters rattling on the roof or flying back through the entrance.

The grovelling object appeared now to be suddenly seized with a fresh access of terror. Wildly and incoherently he made efforts to conceal himself between the remains of a broken chair and the mud wall of the shelter. Then suddenly, spasmodically, he began to dig furiously with his fingers. The huddled men, mostly stretcher-bearers of the R.A.M.C., stared at him in amazement, the pink tabs on his collar, and a decoration on his smart uniform, seemed strangely inconsistent with this extraordinary behaviour. It was a case of complete loss of nerve and self-control. Driven mad with terror, slobbering and moaning, he clawed and scrabbled violently in the mud, his head under the chair. It was like a terrified and overrun fox going to ground, trying to dig his way back to safety through the very bowels of the earth. His behaviour was simply less than human. Extreme terror had driven him back through a thousand generations to some pre-human form of life. I suppose some cringing prehistoric half-human thing, making futile efforts to

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'You're all right—safe here! Keep still—be quiet! In a moment, as soon as this shelling stops we'll carry you to an ambulance! Quite close! You'll go back—straight to the Base—Home—and have a long rest! Try and sit up and swallow some brandy.'

But one might as well have spoken to a mad dog. At last, the shelling abating a little, I got three of the biggest men I had with me to lay hold of this pathetic, scrabbling incoherent animal that had once been a British Staff officer, and we tried to drag him, or carry him out. He resisted violently.

At last after several efforts we got rid of him. Halfway to the ambulance that would carry him to safety he tried to bolt back to us! The three men had to risk their lives to get him across the hundred and fifty yards of comparatively open ground and across a road into an old gun-pit where I had had a Ford motor ambulance concealed. I do not know what became of him; possibly he never reached home alive, or perhaps he is in an asylum. Perhaps, recovered, he shoots partridges now in Norfolk, dines at Claridges, hunts with the North Cotswold, or keeps a chicken farm in Surrey. But when one thinks of how we treated this Staff officer, and how, on the other hand, some poor half-educated, blubbing ploughboy, whose nerves had likewise given way, and who was not much more than half this Staff officer's age, was sent back to face the enemy or be shot for cowardice. . . . But that is war. It must often be luck; it can never mean justice.

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The combined poisons of fear and concussion in modern war are cumulative; they rarely produce their own immunity. On one occasion, one of the bravest men I have known leaned on my shoulder sobbing and said he could stand it no longer. He was senior to me, a Colonel (acting Brigadier); I, only a temporary Lt.-Colonel. He had come out as a private, but his conscientious energy and ability had brought him rapidly to the front. Highly thought of by both Divisional and Corps Commanders, his was an heroic case of endurance. Certainly he was of the bull-necked type, probably well-endowed with vigour and with good nerves.

'Do you think very badly of me for breaking down like this?' he asked. 'You don't know how I've tried for the sake of all the men. I've been out here a solid three years. You don't know what I've been through. For about the sixth time this week I've been knocked silly, stunned. Yesterday a shell burst in a barn, killing twenty-two of my men, and blew me and some of my staff almost from one end of the barn to the other. And this morning again . . . poor young Ellison blown to pieces beside me. . . . Will you tell the Divisional Commander I've tried? I'm sure you know I have.'

He was shaking and twitching all over. I tried to reassure him.

'Of course,' I said, 'I know you've been through ten times as much as I have. I'll ring up the Divisional Commander now and tell him I think you must have at least three months leave. Or, better still, I think I'll go and see him when he's alone.'

The Divisional Commander knew me pretty well, knew anyway that I was not sloppy about letting many down to the Base without just cause; that at least I had been keen about the morale of the Division. He listened sympathetically.

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'But do you think three months is enough, if Blank's nerves are in the condition you describe?' he asked.

'No, sir, it ought to be six—only—well—I thought it was no good asking for the impossible.'

That very day Blank went home and got his six months leave. I feel pretty certain that it saved a complete breakdown. After his return he got further promotion and distinction.

As the War dragged on, the reactions of the different types to danger and strain, the cumulative effects of fear, even the sudden dementia of terror, became more and more familiar.

What *is* fear? Millions must have asked themselves that question in the War, must have tried to give another name to the influence, the grey shape that seemed often at their elbow, that whispered in their ears on the fire-step and in no-man's-land, that before the attack was launched brooded in the leaden skies of those chill dawns, that hovered over them as they slept, that symbolized itself in strings of queer, lurid, meaningless, and incoherent dreams.

Those who plainly show their fear often seem to suffer less reaction afterwards, and vice versa; but we shall probably never be able to draw hard and fast lines between those degrees of fear that can be camouflaged, that merely irritate the temper, and those that numb the memory, destroy initiative, and almost paralyse the brain. The variability of temperament is bewildering. There are some soldiers who bear pain well, who scarcely seem to feel pain, and unimaginatively will do the most reckless things, yet are terribly afraid of death in the abstract. Such men even dislike any talk of death and are strangely depressed at the sight of a funeral or a visit to a cemetery. Others who can face the risk of certain death without a

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qualm, who can discuss methods of suicide cold-bloodedly and destroy themselves when so inclined without any hesitation or compunction, the kind who would not even forget to warm the barrel of their revolver before pressing it to the back of the mouth, have shown they are unable to bear being alone in an empty house, or even to be vaccinated or to endure the slightest pain of any sort. I have seen many soldiers and officers, whose ordinary courage in war or on the football ground was unquestionable, fall down in a faint when lined up in a hospital office or barrack room to receive some trivial and almost painless injection of preventive vaccine. There are men, brave men, who would attempt to cross the Atlantic in an open boat, who dare not ride a bicycle in traffic, are terrified in a fast-moving motor car, and afraid to look over the parapet of a tall building.

There is no cruelty of which a Uniformalist cannot be unconsciously guilty when he has power, when he starts punishing his fellows for not being able to endure just this or that degree of tension, which he thinks he could endure himself but which the individual he is condemning may be quite unfitted to endure. The Uniformalist is too impatient to reflect that the long past 'experiences' of our several ancestors stir in our hearts, tighten our arteries and cut off blood from glands and organs whose internal secretions and perfect functioning is essential for coherent action and steady courage.

We are always, consciously or unconsciously, particularly aware of our own physical and mental inadequacies. At a certain point—a different point in each of us—we tremble, we show the white feather, we fly, because we cannot, except in a moment of enthusiasm, excitement or drunken folly, overcome this defensive mechanism—the warning of *conscious inadequacy* which is but a device to ensure continuity of existence, bequeathed to us by our

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Near La Belle Alliance north of Ypres, in the front line just before an attack was about to take place, I overheard some whispering in the trench close alongside. One of the raiding party wished for leave to go to the latrine; he had, he said, got diarrhoea. Was it fear? Perhaps, or the chill of the sodden trench acting on a hurriedly taken meal, or the effects of both acting together. His request was, of course, very roughly refused with the usual emphasis supplied by the plentiful use of that rather stupid English word which rhymes with 'mucking'. (Is any other nation so fond of this copulative oath as the puritan English?) The frightened youth must have gone forward to the attack, feeling miserably ill and wretched, to blunder ineffectually on to the first German bayonet that came his way. There must often have been many in like case whose death from a military point of view was quite useless. I went back to the comfort of the Brigade Headquarters and had a drink there, thinking of the youngster sweating with terror and half-drunk with ration rum, charging about in a confusing morass of mud and tangled wire and a deafening uproar.

To show how fallacious are the ordinary standards which men employ to decide whether others are frightened, I was personally complimented for coolness at the very moment when my mouth was so dry from fear that I could hardly speak, when I was so deafened and confused with the throb of my own arteries that I could scarcely hear what I was saying. It was certainly, in my

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own case, no question of self-control; I do not remember having ever consciously to exercise control to prevent myself running away. Had I ever reached the stage of fear in which I should have had to exercise *conscious* control to prevent myself running, I believe I should then and there have turned tail and fled; and nothing then would have prevented my galloping away from the enemy, not even the clear and certain knowledge that a court-martial and a firing squad were waiting for me. Indeed, though the trial for cowardice would have been tiresome, the certainty of this instantaneous and painless execution would often have come as a relief from the harrowing uncertainty of conscious fear. It is too easy for those of us who have not *had* to exercise any particular *conscious* self-control to denounce others for not doing so. We all fall very readily into this trap of self-complacency.

Can any physiologist pretend that 'intense fear' can exist without corresponding physical and physiological changes such as irregular heart-beats and diminished internal secretions which, in vicious circles, tend to confuse the brain and thus accentuate the very sense of helplessness that is the primary emotion? There are changes which by alteration of pressure of the blood supply to the brain must automatically cause a human being to 'lose his head'.

From a scientific point of view, Fear is but a protective device which urges an individual to avoid danger by removing himself from it. His blood on the surface of his body actually sets him this example by removing itself rapidly to an interior position, and so blanching his skin. The arteries involuntarily constricted by the muscular fibres in their walls include those that supply the brain and sex organs. So the thoroughly frightened man looks pale, usually cannot think clearly or connectedly, and has

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no sexual desire. A brain and sex organs starved of blood cannot function nor can the various internal secretions be received by the blood to stimulate the circulation, this further increases a man's sense of physical impotence and mental inadequacy. Because his arteries are constricted and his bowels are overloaded with the blood withdrawn from the skin, he is liable to diarrhoea and a need to urinate, symptoms also protective, for if struck by a bullet or knife one will run less danger of fatal complication if bowels and bladder have just been cleansed with fluid drawn from the blood, and then repeatedly emptied. As the sweat and other glands in the skin empty themselves in 'terror', the surface of the skin thereby becomes cleansed and more slippery, giving the individual an additional chance of escape from a glancing blow of knife or bullet or from the clutch of a pursuer.

The physical changes quite beyond the frightened man's control being so numerous and important, it seems unreasonable to pretend that the corresponding mental changes are entirely within his control. Just as everyone has greater or less requirements for meat, drink, warmth, sex indulgence and most other things, so a differing degree of fear will render this one or that irresponsible for their actions. The man whose brain is not functioning properly cannot be held entirely responsible for his actions; unless the deficient functioning be due to his taking alcohol or some other drug. A drunken man in the trenches is therefore more culpable than a frightened one; yet, oddly enough, men were not shot for being too drunk to fight but for being too frightened to go forward!

Private soldiers, who so often are little more than young ploughboys and labourers rushed into uniform, have, materially speaking, little if anything to gain or lose in war. Had the armies of the German Emperor conquered—even if in 1915 they had entered a defeated

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England—ploughboys would still to-day be munching their bread and cheese on the banks of the Tamar and the Tees, the Thames, and the Tweed; but their officers would have been reduced to earning their living as waiters in the clubs for officers of the German Army of Occupation, or compelled to dance as paid gigolos with fat Frauleins from Frankfort or brainless heiresses from Boston. Generally speaking, the men were much younger than their officers, and youth has usually less control and more to lose by premature death than those who are older.

I have seen one of these boys, almost a child, despatched alone to carry some message to an adjoining regiment at a critical moment. He must run here through a barrage of artillery, now through a hail of machine-gun bullets or gas shells and bombs and other weapons of destruction, only to find German bayonets or German bombing parties already established behind one of the traverses of the trenches adjoining the flank of his own units. Often, these lads never reached the unit Headquarters they were sent to find. An ugly blackened shell-hole in the centre of the trench, still smoking with its nitrous fumes, a torn cap or dented helmet on the fire-step, and perhaps the limbs or some blood on the side of the trench, told all too eloquently of the regimental runner who had made his last run.

Naturally most of the cases of 'cowardice' occurred in the front line under circumstances in which a doctor's opinion was neither asked nor desired; any injustice as between officers and men in these cases cannot be generally imputed to the want of moral courage of the doctors. When a doctor *was* consulted he was almost compelled in the case of an officer in whom fear had undermined self-control, to call it a case of neurasthenia, post-influenzal debility, or 'shell-shock', or due to anæmia and

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But the doctor was not as a rule given the chance of similarly excusing the private soldier. To diagnose a case of nerves in an officer as 'cowardice', besides being unkind, would generally be unwise; though if the officer happened to be some poverty-stricken counter assistant who had become a 'temporary' officer, he was likely to get rather less consideration. Such men, though their unmartial traditions and inexperience were an additional excuse, had no influential relations to resent an imputation of cowardice upon their relative, no friends who in the House of Commons or Lords or the Press would call all the gods as witness to the cruelty and incompetence of the 'Army doctors', who, comparatively safe themselves, had condemned by a hurried, faulty and careless diagnosis a brother officer who was ill and whose nerves were shattered, to a disgraceful death.

There is a natural and quite excusable freemasonry amongst ex-Public School boys that tempers justice for

THE SHAPE THAT WALKETH AT NOONDAY one of their own kind. But if the uninfluential temporary officer of lower-class extraction was under some disadvantage, this was even more true of the private soldier who had, as a rule, few friends to raise a storm on his behalf. Young, inexperienced, unintelligent ploughboys would come rushing breathless and incoherent into an Advance Dressing Station or the Headquarters of a Field Ambulance. Without rifle or gas mask, they could scarcely tell you to what regiment they belonged; their nerves frayed, their bodies sweating, sickness and diarrhoea overtaking them. I think of one of the cases I saw, a shock-headed youngster crouched on the ground in an Advance Dressing Station, blubbing and sobbing—not much more than a child, a terror-stricken hunted expression in his eyes.

‘Oh, they’re after me, sir! They’re after me! I *can’t* bear it any longer! I have tried and I can’t—I *can’t*, sir!’ And then a burst of hysterical weeping. And then our rough unsympathetic questions.

‘Who are after you? What do you mean? Where’s your rifle? What regiment do you belong to? Have you run away? If so, you are likely to be shot for being a deserter. Don’t be a fool, boy! I suppose your platoon sergeant saw you run?’

‘Yes, sir,’ sobbing.

‘Don’t be a fool! If you promise me you will run back to your place in the trench and pick up your rifle again, I will telephone to your Colonel that you had an hysterical fit and are all right again.’

I do not remember hearing what happened afterwards in these cases; one had generally no time to enquire. The regimental authorities, naturally, would not wish to have what was to them a clear and obvious case of ‘wilful desertion’ unduly complicated by asking a possibly ‘too humane’ medical witness difficult questions in psychol-

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ogy, questions to which nearly every doctor asked would have given a slightly different answer. An example must be made of someone. And if the scapegoat was friendless and perhaps not very popular—for strain on frayed nerves generally means frayed temper—so much the better. Sometimes a boy received a proper trial and was shot at the order of the court-martial by sullen, depressed and unwilling comrades. Sometimes previous gallantry or youth or some other consideration made the court-martial a little more merciful. Sometimes he was shot down when trying to leave the trench again, by an officer, or sergeant. Perhaps—who knows how often?—he was reported to have been shot ‘accidentally’. The kind of ‘accident’ the hero in the play called *Journey’s End* threatens to have and nearly does have, is easy to have with impunity in war. On occasions, officers—strictly speaking they have the right—when on the run themselves shot some of their own men in the back because they refused to halt and rally; and then—the hideous irony of the situation!—perforce had to continue running themselves.

It is strange that only two or three English officers were shot for cowardice in the War, but nearly four hundred soldiers! There is on an average an officer for every fifteen or twenty men, yet there could hardly have been this huge difference in the relative courage of those Englishmen who wore officers’ uniform and those who did not. Discomfort and irregular feeding—and the men had much more of both than officers—saps the vitality which it is so necessary to have if one is to be consistently brave. The comparative comfort and good pay of the officer as compared with his men, even in war, is very noticeable. We seem to have brought *inequality* to a fine art in England. Certainly it is quite as reasonable to shoot yokels and clerks who cannot ‘stand’ heavy shell-

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fire as to execute those whose 'nerves' make them timid
and useless in a thunderstorm.

Though the number of reported executions of Englishmen for cowardice in the last war be only between three or four hundred, we shall never know one half of the serious injustices in this connection that took place in France and elsewhere in our armies. Do those Senior Officers, who sanctioned this cruel and disproportionate series of executions of persons in another class and with less inducement to be brave, feel guilty now?

On the march between Mauberge and Mons the country folk had insisted on our sticking into our caps diminutive little French and Belgian flags. In Belgium they began to give us small metal medallions of the Sacred Heart and the Virgin Mary, hung on strands of coloured wool. These would, they said, preserve us in danger. Though not a Catholic, I did not see why the image of the Virgin might not be as least as good a talisman as the usual piece of white heather or negro gollywog. That Gallilean peasant girl who mothered a Messiah, so devoted to the Young Genius she had brought into the world, might not her image be as efficacious in deflecting bullets as a gollywog? Anyway, I wore her charm round my neck or carried it in my pocket. *Post hoc* may not be *propter hoc*, but the fates were certainly kind. One bullet passing with a hiss immediately under my nose did its best to give me a quick shave. I felt in my pockets and discovered I had left the locket with the image of the 'little mother' in my billet. I took care never to forget it again!

CHAPTER XXII

THE 'NON-COMBATANTS'

If nothing succeeds like success, nothing conduces so much to a swollen head. 'Pride goeth before a fall!' That particular copybook maxim and a certain rather ominous remark in the Bible concerning the 'green bay tree' haunt my more prosperous moments. Then there was a Latin exercise at school that insisted that 'one must not tempt the gods with boasting'. To provoke the jealousy of contemporaries with self-complacency is equally inadvisable.

After having served with one of the most gallant and entirely likeable regiments in the Army, I was to have another streak of good luck. My disparaged Field Ambulance I found contained a set of officers, N.C.O.'s, and men who were naturally keen, brave and efficient, taking an intelligent personal pride in the unit's reputation for making its patients comfortable and for being smart in its military duties. It was something that Military Medals and Military Crosses, D.C.M.'s and Mentions began to arrive for the junior officers and men of the unit. With the profits of a small canteen which we ran we obtained silver and bronze medals, made in Paris to our own design, and these we gave to those whose names the G.O.C. refused to pass on for official honours.

Trumpet blasts are tiresome things, and in what follows here let it be understood that similar units must often have done as well or a great deal better; but *their*

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good deeds are shrouded forever beneath a most commendable modesty. Yet as so little has been written concerning the work of Field Ambulances, units practically unknown in any previous war, something may be said concerning what those with whom I worked did during two and a half years of strenuous warfare in a Storm Division.

It was the Division's fortune or misfortune to be almost the whole time included with the Guards Division in the 14th Corps. Two such strong Divisions were necessarily kept for the most strenuous of the battlefields, and accordingly, when we were not fighting on the Somme, it was Ypres, and when we were wearied out at Ypres, we were transferred to the Somme battlefield for a 'rest'! Scarcely once during those two and a half years were we given a real rest in a quiet sector of the line.

Naturally, the magnificent strength and prestige of the Guards Division was not to be thrown away too often in routine fighting, so it happened that not only were we confined to the more strenuous battlegrounds but inevitably were placed in the forefront oftener than the Guards; and it happened also that my Field Ambulance was attached to what by general consent was considered to be the most strenuous of the three Brigades in the Division.

Our Brigade Commander, certainly for his military qualities, deserved the Lieutenant-Generalcy and the other honours he afterwards received. He was considered by those who did not love him to be an exacting martinet, a thruster intolerant of the slightest hitch to his plans. He was certainly an able and competent soldier and had influential friends at the War Office of whom even G.H.Q. were slightly afraid. How the Germans must have hated him! And how worn out and worried we all got under his strenuous leadership.

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One day, just before the Battle of Loos, some men of my unit who had been working at high pressure digging a trench by which the wounded could be evacuated from the impending battle, were given a short and much-needed 'stand easy'. A few of them found refreshment in a derelict orchard, about three hundred yards from our front line, through which the trench ran. For daring to defend this 'gross breach of discipline' I was so severely carpeted that a listener might have supposed I had personally imperilled the success of the whole British effort.

Perhaps our nerves should have been stronger and our hides tougher. Largely owing to the high pressure, certain of the younger General Staff officers 'went sick' to the Base. They would come to me complaining that they were being so worried that they scarcely knew what they were doing. Sometimes they even wept and talked of suicide. On occasions, when I had been severely carpeted myself, I thoroughly sympathized. Anyway, I used to send them and their red tabs and their jangled nerves southwards, imperilling my immortal soul by certifying that they were suffering from 'dental caries and chronic gastritis', 'anæmia and disordered action of the heart', or else from 'post-influenzal debility', that never-failing open sesame 'for officers' use only'. Perhaps being nagged at was good for us all and we should have taken our chastisement less rebelliously. Anyway, the Great Man, after having accused me of keeping no discipline in my unit, must have changed his opinion, for he afterwards applied to G.H.Q. that I should be sent as Medical Director to his new Division. G.H.Q., with a proper regard for my tender skin, somehow discovered that I was 'too young'.

Pressure inevitably passes downwards and usually some wretched lance-corporal or private has to pay for those

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'errors in diet' which make generals liverish, the colonels under them exacting, majors peppery, and turn sergeant-majors into nightmares.

As every doctor knows, 'worry often kills; hard work seldom'. Regimental officers have been more eloquent than I can be about 'those Returns'. Yet, as the next 'Great' War already looms up one more grouse may be worth while. A Field Ambulance had nearly everything on its charge from a hypodermic syringe to a horseshoe, from horses and motor cars to the kukris of the wounded Ghurkas. We must take care of the wounded and their kits of every unit and nationality, Hindus, Portuguese, Germans, Chinese coolies or Australian gunners. We must test well-water for poison and 'short-sighted men' for funk; we must keep oats for our horses and champagne for our invalids, vaccinate French babies in distant villages, and build shell-proof dug-outs for wounded in the reserve trenches. We must parade alongside crack regiments with our pole chains shining and our G.S. wagons freshly painted. We must step *long* with tall Guardsmen and extra short with small Cockney riflemen; and, in addition, we must record, check and enumerate *everything*. An old torn pocket-book records a list of our 'returns'—death, desertion, drunkenness, diphtheria; self-inflicted wounds, shell-shock and shell dressings. We must know all about mumps and mange; horseflies and hot-water bottles; trench boots and trench feet; vermoral sprayers, vaccine, venereal disease, and vermin; chilblains, colic, constipation, and chaplains. And so the list went on. Such is the genealogy of Victory! The clerks, if they learned nothing else, must at least have learned how to fake 'Returns'.

After these and a hundred other things had been attended to, the fact that the pay, training, and discipline

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of our own men had to be carried out while the unit was continually on the move and engaged in looking after the sick and wounded of other units and mules and motor cars—was a mere nothing.

Unfortunately, as the Field Ambulance I commanded was no longer the divisional scapegoat but winning commendations from all sides, we were getting more and more work and responsibility thrust upon us, the willing horse being constantly urged to tighten the traces.

We did our best to leave things a little better than we found them in our many billets, from which every ten days or so we were moved away just as we had got them as clean and as spick and span as dressing stations for sick and wounded ought to be. In the ranks of the unit were many skilled craftsmen, a state of affairs rare amongst Regulars. From these men, when they were not occupied in carrying laden stretchers under shell-fire through miles of mud, we formed carpenters', painters' and bricklayers' 'squads'. Led by two excellent men, Sergeant Buckle and Corporal Headley, both of them R.A.M.C., these detachments certainly did wonders in restoring and repairing the generally filthy and dilapidated buildings we were ordered to occupy as temporary dressing stations.

Restoration began with the shifting of many scores of waggon-loads of manure and debris, the whole unit working like navvies. The process went on with paving and road-making, painting and whitewashing. One of our carpenters' best efforts was putting in a temporary staircase in the St. Stanislaus College at Poperinghe where, the original having been destroyed by a shell before our arrival, we found it impossible to use part of the upper storey. We had the luck to have capable cooks; from the bones of our liberal meat ration and from the

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vegetables we bought from the French farmers they made some of the best soup I have ever tasted, and more than we could all consume. So our cooks used to dish it out to any of the troops who wanted it and who passed our dressing station daily on the frozen road near Trones Wood, numbed, weary, and rather dispirited on their way back to the front line. Then we discovered that as the ordinary Tommy liked his tea 'black', a very good and drinkable second brew could be made from the many pounds of tea consumed daily; this we handed out with what was left of our bread, butter, sugar, and jam rations to the poorer civilians, especially the old women and children. On the Somme we did the same for the refugees from Cambrai, receiving afterwards a formal letter of thanks from the French Government. The owners of buildings we had occupied also wrote expressing their thanks. Like other medical units we were often employed in inoculating the French civilian population against typhoid or in treating their ordinary ailments.

It was soon evident that it was almost as important to restore the morale of the sick and wounded as to cure their ailments. They must go back to their Regiment in the front line not flabby and 'hospitalized' but still soldiers, their rifles clean as well as their teeth, and both could be ruinously neglected in war. But often the limit of endurance was reached for all of us. When the Division was in the front line we must accept responsibility for constructing dug-outs in which the wounded could receive first-aid as well as for getting the wounded back as rapidly as possible from the trenches. Rapidly? Rapidly across miles of mud and shell-holes! Sometimes it was more than 8,000 yards of solid trudging, most of it through deep sticky mud. Rapidly! In pitchy blackness, the weary stretcher-bearers' steps guided on those sinuous tracks and slippery and splintered duckboards

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only by the uncertain glint of star-shells and Verey Lights and the flash of bursting shells. When the tracks passed over rising ground there came the swish-swish of spent bullets from machine-guns, and in the hollows further back the hum and purr of fragments of shell. Yet, though the fighting man must generally keep in the trenches and when alone or in small parties is usually free to dodge a shell or bolt into a dug-out, the stretcher-bearer—often not in the trenches, but over exposed ground—going dead slow to avoid jolting his patient, has a load he cannot throw down—with the screech of an oncoming shell close behind him he must just keep on.

The weight of a patient with his kit and rifle, the whole of it clogged with mud and soaked with rain, the stretcher and the sodden and frequently blood-soaked blankets that covered it, could be tremendous: the stretcher bearers' hands growing numb with exposure to the cold rain and sleet and bitter wind. When they got their patient through these miles of perilous mud to the Advanced Dressing Station, it would be perhaps only to find that he was already dead, the underside of his body sticking, frozen with his own blood, to the blankets and canvas beneath him. And these stretcher-bearers were so often disparagingly spoken of by full-bellied Colonels and Quartermasters far back in Rouen and Havre as 'mere non-combatants'.

When the Division's spell in the line was varied by what was called 'rest', there was no rest for these men. While the fighting man rested and cleaned his kit, we, the 'non-combatants', must be cleaning up a derelict farm and attending to the sick who had not been allowed to go off duty during the fighting when the Brigade was scattered in the broken trenches in front of Ypres or Guillemont. It was our business when the Division was resting to prevent all but the most serious cases of illness or

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accidental injury, and there were many of these, from getting caught up in the cogs of the evacuating machinery, which started immediately behind a Field Ambulance, and which carried the only-too-willing patients (Poor devils! who could blame them?) through motor convoys and casualty clearing stations, ambulance trains and base hospitals and hospital ships, back to spacious country mansions in England, and convalescent homes—to havens of peace at Blackpool and Dartmouth or to learn to play golf at Malvern or spend long summer days fishing and prawning at Fowey. In the press and confusion of the War they might never return to the Division again, or, if they were lucky, only after many months. If they were well-connected, social influence or favouritism might transmute them into 'indispensables' sheltering beneath the umbrella of 'Home-Service-for-the-duration'.

In those two and a half years we were to be six times in the Ypres salient and three times on the Somme battlefield, once there continuously for six months. Sometimes, as a Corps Rest Station with half the unit working in or near the trenches, we took in sick or slightly wounded officers from the Guards as well as from our own Division. Amongst those that came in sick or wounded I can recollect Arthur Howard, whom I could remember as a small boy in Brinton's House at Eton, and Jack Stirling, both of the Scots Guards. Shortly afterwards, our Corps Commander, made an unexpected visit. 'Fatty', as he was called by young Guardees, had, like most ex-Guards Division Commanders, a very high sense of efficiency and all the conventional Guardsman's obsession for smartness, and had not, I suspect, a very high opinion generally of the 'non-combatant' Royal Army Medical Corps. As a private soldier I had discovered this opinion

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to be widely shared in the Army; partly it is due to caste snobbery and jealousy of the airs and privileges of a 'learned middle-class profession', which 'unlearned' though often quite intelligent soldiers may rather naturally harbour; also it may be partly justified. In an isolated garrison, an incompetent and lazy doctor is a public danger. That day, at all events, 'Fatty' was very pleasant; possibly he came prepared to be pleased, or he may have been genuinely satisfied. Not long after this, during the absence on special leave of their own Brass Hat, I was ordered to officiate as the Director of the Medical Services of the Guards Division whilst continuing to act as Commander of a Field Ambulance in the 20th; this unusual order rather suggesting that neither the Guards nor the 20th required very much of my services.

On the day I took over this double job the Germans thought it proper to start shelling the north-eastern outskirts of Poperinghe, including the area occupied by one of the Guards' field ambulances whose buildings, transport, and patients had to be evacuated at top speed. That same evening I dined at one of the Company Headquarters of the Scots Guards, then in the line at Poteige. The cheery meal was accompanied by a running fire of ironical comment concerning the infrequency of visits to the front line by Directors and certain other Staff officers. Amongst others whom I knew in this mess was one who, just before the War, had lain pale and bleeding on our bob-sleigh at the Gerschni Alp. One of the runners of the bob had broken off at an ice-corner during a race; harpooning up through the under side of the bob, the long steel splinter had transfixed his leg and then upset us while we were going at something like fifty miles an hour. We talked in that sordid dug-out of those past days of winter sports, of the careless extravagance of pre-

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War gaiety, of hunting and dancing, of anything and everything except war. But I discovered that Guardsmen in the trenches could be just as disgruntled as the rest of the real fighting men at the shameless way in which decorations were being cornered by those who lived in luxury and comparative safety at Divisional, Corps, and Army Headquarters.

The night was dark and stormy when I set out from company Headquarters to walk back to meet the car I hoped was waiting for me near the Water Tower on the further side of Ypres. From the trenches near Poteige to the Menin Gate and thence through the now ruined and deserted city to the Water Tower, one of the German's favourite targets, could not have been much more than a couple of miles; but the road, often shelled, was full of craters and covered with the shattered remains of venturesome limber wagons and other vehicles, which in the earlier months had essayed to use the road. The walk back alone in the driving rain and wind was dreary enough; I was glad when I overtook a sapper who was limping in the same direction.

'No, sir,' he replied to my question, 'I'm not wounded, only sick, worse luck. I've been wounded twice. I suppose I shall keep on being sent back to the line until I'm scuppered like the others, and there's many I knows of, my young brother-in-law for one, who's been billeted in farmhouses at Cromer and Hunstanton for two years and never been out here yet, and they'll take damn good care they never do come!'

He seemed hardly able to walk so I gave him my arm; as we stumbled along in the darkness he complained frequently of the pain in his back.

'You ought to have been carried back on a stretcher. Who sent you sick?' I asked.

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'The Quartermaster, sir. We ain't got no doctor. Are you the Quartermaster of the Scots Guards?'

I told him I was a doctor.

'I suppose, sir, as I'm only sick and not wounded I shall be shoved back into the line again pretty quick. The sick out here don't generally get much sympathy.'

I felt I rather agreed with him. Presently the pain in his back became so severe we had to stop. Eventually I had to put my arm round his waist, and we stumbled along in the darkness and rain, helped on our way by the occasional flare of a Verey Light or a shell bursting at Hell Fire Corner or near the Menin Gate. It was a bore to have to keep on stopping, but all the same I was glad that I had met someone. Once or twice my companion considerably urged me to go on and leave him, for our progress was getting very slow and they had begun to shell the road just ahead of us rather heavily. But humanity apart, I preferred company, even if the danger might be a little increased by the snail's pace at which we were going. Loneliness on that dark road would have made it dark indeed and danger seem more dangerous.

The close presence of a fellow-being, even one more helpless, gives us confidence and courage. Life itself, I reflected, could be rather a lonely business, rather like that dark road, ending in flickering shadows at another portal even more dreaded than the Menin Gate. The common and much-abused human craving for *physical* intimacy was surely an attempt to escape from the *spiritual* loneliness from which we all suffer more or less. Men try to forget this isolation in the dope of sport, or drink, or gambling, or bodily contact. After all, Life, for all we know, may be futile, just a transient cosmic accident without meaning or purpose; but for a moment or two in the arms of a friend we can forget Life. The physical touch seems to relieve mental tension. 'Let us

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hold hands and sing Auld Lang Syne.' At some tense moment I've heard even the driest and most cynical of Anglo-Indian bureaucrats get as far as that. Drink and make merry! Why not? Our senses, our affections, our lusts even, are given by a compassionate heaven to rescue us from a too constant realization of our own impotence and our inevitable end. The human lot on this planet could be dreary enough without the moralists and puritans trying to deprive men and women of such antidotes and consolations, of such temporary forgetfulness as the senses provide.

We were near the Menin Gate now, and by ill chance the Germans had begun shelling the northern approach to it just as some limbers and wagons were coming through in our direction. One shell landed right on top of a limber that must have contained some paraffin or Verery Lights or something of the sort. The drivers shouted and lashed their teams into a gallop; some of the limbers were overturned, and stray horses and mules, two of them badly injured, galloped past us. In the light from the blazing limber one could see that one of the mules had its belly torn open, bowel protruding and beginning to drop down and to trail on the ground. As the wretched animal galloped past us it was now and again actually treading on parts of its own entrails, its ghastly condition growing worse at every step. Finally, it brought itself to an agonized standstill and stood quivering and braying on the road, a pitiful object. I am afraid I was too much occupied with our danger to give it very much thought and besides, I had seen such things too often before. As luck would have it there was a lull in the firing as we hobbled through the Gateway. In the Square at Ypres we found a limber wagon from my unit collecting firewood, and the driver fetched an ambulance wagon for us. Then, except for some shelling at the

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Water Tower and at the point where the railway line north of Valamertinghe crossed the road near Goldfish Villa, we got no more shelling.

The 'strained back' of which my companion complained proved to be the pain of acute pneumonia beginning. When the motor convoy came the next day to remove him and others to the casualty clearing station *en route* to the Base hospital, he begged to be allowed to remain. We consented, though it was a strict order to send all seriously sick down to the Base; yet the long cold journey with its many changes would almost certainly have been extremely bad for him. The orderlies in the ambulance constructed a screen and made him thoroughly comfortable. He lay on a well-padded stretcher on trestles with many blankets and plenty of hot-water bottles and with a basin of chicken broth or a tumbler of egg-flip with plenty of sugar and brandy in it always beside him. It so happened he was still in the ambulance when our Corps Commander inspected us again; this time it was an official inspection. Hearing the nature of the man's disease he demanded why contrary to all orders I had kept such a severe case in a unit that was not only not a hospital but housed in a dilapidated building which might at any moment be shelled, and which day or night we might have to evacuate at short notice. 'Wouldn't you have preferred, my man, to have gone right down as you should have done to safety in a big Base hospital and have nursing sisters to look after you? I can't imagine why you have been kept here,' he added, looking annoyed.

'No, sir,' said my companion of the dark road, stoutly; he was then almost convalescent. 'I'd much rather stay where I am! I couldn't have been better treated or more comfortable than I have been here.' He looked up gratefully at the two nursing orderlies who had charge of him.

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'I've been down to the Base twice already wounded, and—well, you'll excuse me, sir—but I've had some!'

The General said no more, and one felt just for a moment that there could be compensations even for all the sweat and worry and all the din and squalor of the War.

Doubtless, much of our success was due to eyewash. It must always be so in military service. When we had scraped out all the manure and burnt the rubbish in some derelict farm and scrubbed the floors with chloride of lime in the water to get the boards white, washed the paintwork with cresol, covered the middens with ashes, scrounged, begged, or borrowed red blankets instead of the brown ones and obtained from the very generous managers of the London theatres and music halls enough of the gaudy posters of their 'attractions' with which to paper the walls of our barns; when we had whitewashed and cleaned everything and made the derelict farm which we were to occupy for perhaps only ten days or so look as nearly as possible like one of the wards at Guy's or St. Thomas's, the Generals would be impressed, and the patients would be cheered with the vision of the lively young women in scanty, semi-transparent, crêpe-de-chine knickers skipping through the posters of Mr. Cochran's revues. But if the Generals were pleased and the patients cheered up, it was my N.C.O.'s and men who had to work overtime to do it and I who got most of the kudos.

In one farm we occupied, two hundred wagon-loads of manure had to be removed before we could use a range of buildings to put the sick and wounded in. Then we had to bring from the ruins of Ypres, nearly 10,000 yards distant, an almost equal amount of broken bricks and rubble to make up the roads which were knee-deep in mud, and then to drain out a filthy and odoriferous

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duckpond in the centre of our 'hospital' into which every kind of garbage had been thrown for two years. Beneath the manure we removed we came upon eighteen sacks of brand-new saddlery which had been 'lost' beneath the manure by an Australian or Canadian Supply Column. The manure removed was banked up in ridges and covered with wood ashes. Then we sent for a guinea box of Sutton's flower seeds and sowed them on these ridges, and presently—to be more exact about three months later—when we were ordered to return to this same area (Peselhoek)—behold, the place was blossoming like the rose. A very riot of petunias and nemophila and escolchias and nasturtiums and a dozen other things were astonishing the natives. Even the grumpy farmer whose eggs Privates MacGilligan and Brown had so regularly 'found' was quite pleased. Smiling, he met me at the gate and, gripping my hand, pointed to his now multi-coloured dunghills:

'Voilà, Monsieur le majeur—les jardins des anglais!'

But it is easy to do everything and anything when you have 240 willing hands to do it all for you. Thus are medals and decorations and promotions and—in more extended fields—even greater distinctions won, by those who don't do too much of the digging.

In the late autumn of 1916, home on short leave, I was to see my father for the last time. He was pleased I had been decorated—more pleased than I, for I realized that decorations were going cheap. To my surprise, it seemed he had grown rather half-hearted about the war. An Evangelical himself, he had always admired the solid domesticity, the sentimental worthiness of the German. He belonged to a conservative generation that admired Queen Victoria and her German relations, especially her philanthropic German cousin and husband, the good

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Prince Albert, and looked down upon the mercurial insouciance of the Latin races, distrusting their addiction to 'gallantry', the Roman Catholic religion, and other 'vices'.

When he had entered the Navy as a midshipman there was current the slogan: 'Fear God! Honour the King! And hate a Frenchman!' Then, in the Baltic and Crimean campaigns against Russia, he had fought shoulder to shoulder with the French as well as the Turk. The Turk he considered a better soldier and a more likeable and more dependable comrade than the French. Now his sons and grandsons were fighting with the French against both German and Turk in order, amongst other things, to *give* Czarist Russia Constantinople, after his own generation in the Navy had endured the rigours of a Crimean winter in order to *prevent* her having it. He was curiously depressed about Christopher Craddock's defeat by the Germans at Coronel. I had met the Admiral when we had both been guests of the Strathconas just before the War, at Glencoe, and we had been out deer-stalking together. He was witty, amusing, and good-natured, but struck me then as being impulsive, if not reckless. We had smashed his conqueror only by hopelessly outclassing him in ships and guns; it was that fact that rankled with my father. There had been no glorious and decisive victory against Germany with *equal forces*, either on land or sea. About Jutland he evidently felt disturbed, scarcely caring to discuss it. He was no longer confident.

On one point, his estimate of the fighting capacity of the French officer and soldier, we could not agree. He held the old-fashioned English notion that they were 'no good'. I was not so sure.

Once I had cherished the hearty and ancient English prejudice concerning the uselessness of 'the dandy',

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especially the French officer; the war changed my opinion. There was, for instance, the Vicomte de Vauvineur attached to our Regiment as Brigade liaison officer, whose first appearance was certainly rather startling. A few hours after the Regiment landed in Boulogne, while we bivouacked in some fields overlooking the Channel, a small figure that might have walked straight out of *The Chocolate Soldier* suddenly appeared. Scarcely more than five feet in height, with a flaxen wig, rouged cheeks, a wonderful tunic of powder blue with silver buttons and braid, a shako to match with a crimson top, crimson breeches trimmed with silver braid, and delicate patent leather leggings and boots whose thin soles and pointed toes would have been more appropriate in Bond Street. Thus arrayed, the gallant Vicomte rather took our breath away as, with the wonderful poise with which the French are gifted, he raised a small hand delicately gloved in lemon yellow to his smart shako and smilingly placed himself at our service. In our field-service kit, none the better for forty-eight hours in trains and boats, we presented a strange contrast to this dapper little man in his neat silver spurs and thin leather belt, so narrow and fragile it might have adorned the waist of a flapper.

On several of our earlier marches I rode alongside the Vicomte whose forecast—I thought then—was depressing. We should not, he opined, be able to hold up the German advance, but the Allied Armies would be driven back upon Paris. 'Paris might be taken.' He shrugged his shoulders philosophically, but as long as we kept in line with the French Armies right and left of us he thought there was no real danger of a lasting German victory. 'The War would be long, 'as long as your war against the Boers'. Russia would do little but immobilize the Austrian armies. He did not trust Italy; she would, he thought, almost certainly remain neutral throughout

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the War for the sake of what she could get out of the baffled and exhausted combatants when the War was over. She would bargain and let both sides down; that was his conviction.

His charming courtesy and wit made one entirely forget the, to us, rather feminine gestures of his beringed and manicured little hands. In our charge with the 9th Lancers on Shrapnel Monday the gallant Vicomte—though it was certainly not his duty—insisted on taking part; indeed, the brave little man actually rode at the head of one of our squadrons and was literally blown in halves. How near the truth many of his predictions had been! I am less inclined now to doubt a man's courage and intelligence because his dress or manner seems effeminate. In England we rather pose in the opposite direction; many of us are at special pains to sprawl, to be untidy, off-hand and brusque. This studied roughness is just as much, if not more, of an affectation as the flaxen wig and beringed fingers of the dashing Vicomte.

Vauvineur's appearance in our camp at Boulogne was quickly followed by that of the Mayor whom our C.O. had invited to lunch with us. A moment or two later the musical comedy effect was further heightened by an excited messenger bursting into the camp with the news that the Germans were actually landing only a mile away! 'Swimming ashore naked with their horses to the beach!' The ships from which they had disembarked had, he explained, 'not been observed'; but the French coast batteries were being hastily manned to repel this extraordinary invasion of naked horsemen. It all sounded absurdly incredible. What was to be done? Then someone remembered that most of the 2nd Cavalry Brigade had been sent down early that morning to one of the neighbouring beaches to strip, wash, and exercise the

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horses in the sea. So the Mayor of Boulogne was able to resume his lunch.

Later on in the War one was told that the nakedness of English officers at almost this same spot provoked a characteristic remark from Lord Curzon, who had married the sister of a Chicago corn dealer. Delayed at Boulogne, he had been taken for a drive along the coast: noticing a number of men bathing in their birthday suits the great man pompously demanded of his fair companion who they were. He was told they were British naval and military officers from the destroyers and the Convalescent Camp at Wimereux. After surveying them through his glasses his lordship majestically exclaimed:

'Dear me! I was not aware that the middle classes had such white skins!'

CHAPTER XXIII

RELIGION—AND THE CONSCRIPT

The newspapers would have it that we were 'knights'. The Romantics indulge in golden reveries concerning knights in armour, gallants filled with high resolve fighting for Jehovah against Allah, Christ against Krishna, the Cross versus the Crescent. The typical Crusader apparently first pawned his castle to the local Abbot to raise funds for the jaunt and then went infidel-killing in the East. According to the historians, *en route* to the Holy Land he misbehaved himself quite extravagantly in the brothels of Venice and Constantinople. Eventually, worn out and bankrupt, he brings back to England the syphilis and other diseases he so carelessly acquired on his travels, a type of tourist not yet extinct. And this mediæval knight on horseback and in armour likely, if wounded or captured to be ransomed rather than enslaved or killed, was supposed to be the prototype of the modern officer; while his villeins, protected only by their leathern jerkins, stood about the knight nearer the enemy, on foot and so with much less chance of escape, liable to death or torture and servitude if taken prisoner, represent the modern privates in the ranks; who would scorn to be led by 'officers' who so obviously ran less risk than they did. Such knights would to-day almost certainly be court-martialled for the cowardice of wearing protective armour which their men could not afford.

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Standing one day before a great altar to the Hindu Trinity in one of the vast South Indian temples, I watched a Brahmin, who had been making his obeisances, trace the mystical sign of Shiva—rather like a trident or a Greek Upsilon—in the ashes in front of one of the images.

‘Where and what do you think God is?’ I asked him.

‘Sahib! Rām-Rām khali dil men hai!’ (God lives only in the heart—the Kingdom of Heaven is within you.) God, this Brahmin evidently believed, was the aggregated goodness of all kind-hearted men, but I, brought up as a child in Christian England, had been persuaded—with a whip—to believe in a God of Battles ‘who teacheth my fingers to fight’; to worship a Grotesque Thing that was a cross between a police-court magistrate, an Anglican bishop and a Jewish tribal chieftain. Our tendency in Europe to settle our disputes with fisticuffs was fortified by the warlike religious history we imbibed at school.

On our way up to Mons from Boulogne in August, 1914, we had spent a night or two in the little village of Damousies. It was a green and pleasant spot, a tranquil place through whose level orchards and meadows went a clear brook. Here five or six of the subalterns of the 9th Lancers and several of the 4th Dragoon Guards had what for many of us was a last delightful swim. Beneath the pollarded willows and blue skies and in that clear water their white bodies gleamed and flashed. Sitting on the bank, drying myself in the August sun, I listened to their laughter and cheerful voices, wondering when we should bathe again amidst such idyllic surroundings. The air that afternoon had been thick with rumours concerning the crushing onward march through Liège and Namur of the German armies. Almost cer-

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tainly, within a day or two, we should have to meet that victorious host; and no Regular soldier could have any doubt as to what for many of us was likely to be the result of that first encounter.

That evening six of us slept on the floor in the village schoolroom, Solly Flood; Oldrey, our Adjutant; Dunham, Quartermaster; Dennis Darley, Pat Fitzgerald, and myself. When we had more or less undressed, Fitzgerald, whom I had already got to like—I do not think anyone could have helped liking him—knelt on the floor against one of the school benches and said his prayers. Afterwards—he lay next to me—he lit a candle and read the New Testament. We were all silent when we saw him kneeling—busy with our thoughts. I had not prayed, that I could remember, since I had been a schoolboy. Which of us was competent to give advice to a supposedly Omniscient Almighty as to what he should do to rectify the confusion into which this extraordinary little world he had thought fit to make, was falling?

Prayer was a reinforcement of will-power by auto-suggestion; the weak-willed would have special need to pray: those who felt less need could at least keep silent. Possibly if only five men in the councils of Europe had prayed successfully to be given a little common sense and common honesty, then the wretched catastrophe that marched towards us that night might have been avoided, the millions of young men and children terrorized with brutality, numbed with despair or swept away in the world-wide epidemics and famines that always follow great wars might have been spared, the youth and genius of a lost generation would to-day have been carrying the now all but extinguished torch of human Hope still higher.

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We were constantly told that we were to fight for 'Civilization'. Those octopus cities, grey, sprawling and smoke-begrimed, their tentacles of mean suburbs stretching out further and further over the country. Were such things worth preserving? Then—it was a disturbing thought—the Germans had challenged us not only upon the seas, but in classroom, laboratory, and factory. It needed no prophet to foresee what was going to happen in such a struggle with such a nation, undoubtedly brave, patient and thorough. Things would soon be done, perhaps, if all this propaganda had any truth in it—were already being done, fiendish and brutal things, cold-blooded lies, calculated infamies, beside which the self-indulgence of Roman Emperors, the Rose Gardens of Heliogabalus, the sexual incontinence of the Cities of the Plain, would seem but puerile trifles, but sensual folly. Our whole standard of honesty and morality would change and shrink, perhaps be engulfed in the general ruin. By hook or by crook—if necessary and perhaps the more easily by crook—we had got to gain a victory over the grey legions that were already tramping southward towards that sleeping village, that darkened schoolroom. Could I have anticipated how Allenby's Cavalry would exhaust the scanty wells and pools in Palestine, foreseen those haggard despairing faces of men and women and children kneeling with parched tongue by the roadside in that arid country, begging, praying to our men who rode past for a little water! 'My babe and I are dying; we have had nothing to drink for four days. All of us are dying'—known a thousandth part of what the War was to mean I might indeed have felt gloomy.

Pat had blown out his candle, the schoolroom in the little French village was wrapped in darkness and silence. Still sleepless, I began considering Pat's sturdy defiance

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of the officers' conventional shyness concerning private prayer. He was an Irish Protestant, perhaps that explained it. I had already noticed how he looked after the men of his Machine-Gun Section almost as a mother, never thinking of himself, often getting chaffed by the O.C. and the others when he arrived breathless, unbuttoned and late for meals. I knew he was hurried and dishevelled only because he had been foraging to the last moment to find food and comforts for his men.

For many days along the hot and dusty roads of France, lined with apple trees weighed down with their ripening fruit, Pat and I rode side by side. Expecting we should both die, we had long and serious conversations; inevitably we discussed religion and immortality. I rather shocked him by saying that I believed all of us were already in Eternity. He would not agree. Immortality, he insisted, was 'part of a future promise'! I argued that in the eye of an Omnipotent Creator, who was above and outside petty human conventions concerning Time and Space, Eternity could be but an Everlasting Instant. So any reality of existence we had as individuals consisted not of our idea of ourselves, but of God's idea of us—whatever that might be—included as we were in Eternity.

'But, Christ definitely promised us that we should sit in Heaven in a Hereafter!'

'Yes, but surely, Pat, you don't imagine that Heaven is a place, a location, a geographical entity?'

'Then you don't believe in the Resurrection?'

'No, not in a literal sense; Heaven must be a State of Mind, a condition, not a place, and Christ's Spirit and His Body surely attained Heaven as soon as he decided to sacrifice himself.'

I have tried to remember the gist of our discussions

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because our feelings and ideas may have been fairly typical. I was to him the 'materialist', the doctor, the rationalist, and he with his simple trusting faith represented so much that is good, such well-intentioned loyalty to Hebraic traditions, though it seemed to me loyalty too unreflecting and easily credulous. He did not think a 'soldier'—an 'officer' and a 'gentleman'—should criticise any English institution, any established thing in his *own* country; scarcely even the drains!

For some of those who, unwillingly conscripted, anything but convinced of the justness of our long feud with Germany since the Jameson Raid, lay mortally wounded in no-man's-land one could not help feeling specially sorry.

To endure a martyrdom for a cause one disbelieved in, to die miserably in a murderous struggle of which they were ashamed, was indeed to be up upon a Cross; and there was no one to pass up to them even the traditional sponge soaked with hyssop. The conscripted in their death throes were of all men the most miserable. The Christ who had suffered had at least suffered voluntarily; surely that alone made suffering more bearable. And he suffered believing that his suffering would blot out the transgressions and ensure the salvation of the entire human race. That was worth suffering for. Were there not many, even quite ordinary men, such as those X-ray operators whose hands withered away, who would gladly die, even face agony, if they could be assured of such a result? The suffering of a Messiah had been foretold by prophets; He knew or thought He knew that His end was a pre-destined sacrifice for the stupidities and transgressions of mankind; until the very last moment He was confident that he would be that day in Paradise. Only at the very end did that awful cry 'Forsaken!' the cry of the dying conscript, escape from the Sufferer on

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the Cross, almost as if He then half realized, half feared He was self-deceived. But these wretched conscripts had none of a self-confident Messiah's celestial consolations. Their agony was, to their own minds, just futile and unnecessary—only one more degrading evidence of the impotence of 'God', of the stupidity and brutality of the human race. These men would not even have post-humous honour. They knew that if their names were remembered at all it would be rather with the reproach that they had had to be conscripted, forced on to the battlefield. Hunched up out there between the wire, dying, with no hope in this world and yet too sensible to suppose that such a useless and involuntary death could bring them any hope in the next, if there was one—how bitter must have been their thoughts! Does such intense bitterness in death escape into the general air to breed a contagion that confuses men's minds, that brings human society to chaos, that shakes faith, that poisons a generation? Does the miasma of those battlefields still brood over Europe?

If matter is indestructible, then Thought—thoughts such as these men must have had—may not be any more evanescent. If we provoke great suffering and great bitterness, if we force men into murder competitions, may there not ascend into the ocean of thought waves whose reactions may be more important than we suspect? Dare we, if only for the sake of ourselves and our children, offend even the weaklings who do not want to fight, who do not cynically believe that the end justifies the means, who were perhaps presented with a 'white feather' by some grinning, empty-headed flapper?

It was the 'religious' people who professed to be most shocked at the use of poison gas and submarines. Bows and arrows, maces and battle-axes are naturally beloved

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by the romanticists and antiquarians. Our bishops and the House of Lords pretended to be horrified at the use of gas, but their lordships thought there was nothing particularly wrong when the blade of a British bayonet—twelve inches or so of cold steel—was driven repeatedly into the chest and bowels of an 'enemy'. The brutal technique of bayonet thrusting insists on the final twist of the blade in the bowel before it is withdrawn, in order to make the wound fatal. In the blind excitement of a charge the first thrust is usually made too high, the blade getting fixed in the cartilages of the ribs so firmly that the body of the wounded man has often to be forced off the blade with your boot in order to get it clear for another thrust lower down. 'Hitting below the belt' in this game is not only permissible but obligatory. 'Never mind,' said their lordships, 'play the game—we *must* be conservative even in our methods of slaughter and torture.'

On board the *Palawan* homeward bound from the Cape, an officer of the Dublin Fusiliers described how when his regiment made their charge at Glencoe several old Boers—white-whiskered old men dressed in black coats like Methodist parsons—knelt and screamed for mercy, while his men, who had been propagandized into believing that every Boer was a treacherous cur, thrust and thrust again. The shrieks of these old men, as their stomachs were repeatedly split open with bayonets, he would 'never be able to forget'.

Gas—their lordships objected—was not a classical weapon, though it is said the English, when to windward of the French Fleet at the Battle of Sluys in 1314, hoisted bags of quicklime to their yardarms, thereby blinding the French gunners. Not too bad an attempt at tear-gas. Worst of all, the weaker side might use poison gas and win. Its manufacture and use requires not so much brawn as scientific training; and we in England

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are more at home with tennis racquets and polo sticks than with test tubes.

Lying flat on the crest of the canal bank near Ypres one could see as far northward as La Belle Alliance and the Houthulst Forest, from which the German guns had for months pounded our line. Behind in the sunlight, half hidden in a haze of brick-dust and smoke of bursting shell, lay Brielen, where our transport, howitzer batteries and field ambulances, grouped closely together, presented an obvious target to the German observation balloons. With eyes closed it was a relief to forget this too familiar scene. I used to imagine I was once again on Porthala cliffs watching the long Atlantic seas breaking upon St. Anthony's rugged point. Between great banks of slate-coloured clouds, their hard, oily-looking edges foretelling fresh storms, the level rays of the setting sun would be lighting up Mollunnon's caves and Porth Bier's cliffs and Towan's sandy shore, foam lashed by the abating storm. Over Black Lugo, buried or bobbing in the troughs of the seas, tugging at his bearded chain, would go the hurricane gusts sweeping up over Bohella to lose themselves with wild cracking of boughs amongst the young oaks of Boslogas. I could almost smell the clean sea wind above the stale and tainted odours of the canal. Then the dusk would fall and the stars that I had learnt to hate—I could no longer think of them as a spangled meshwork on the dark robe of night—would come out over the German line like glittering points. There was no room in the world now for poetic fancies about even the stars, so steely bright and cold, the glittering prison bars of Man's captivity in a world that seemed at that moment so futile and smelt so foul that you must spit to get the taste from your mouth. Hunched up and cold, one stumbled back to Brigade Headquarters.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SOLDIERS' MORALS—AND OTHER PEOPLE'S

It is recorded of St. Aloysius that he scourged himself because another young man had once seen his naked ankles. So great was his purity that he would not be left alone in a room with any woman, not even his mother, lest one or other might be tempted to entertain improper thoughts.

Soldiers, perhaps it is just as well, cannot hope to emulate such purity of mind and chastity of conduct, even if the moral of this story would seem to point to puritanism as being the father of perversion.

In a crowded carriage on a leave train between Folkestone and London in November, 1917, I sat next to a chaplain. We had heard him enlarging on the boat about the 'terrible' amount of venereal disease and generally the 'sinfulness' of the troops he had been looking after at Havre and other places. Havre, one of the largest Base camps, was also the principal centre for the treatment of venereal disease for British troops in France. We were none of us disposed to take this padre very seriously. The general feeling amongst those who had had pre-War experience of Army life, at home or abroad, was that much of the much-advertised 'immorality' of our men in France could be discounted.

In the train the chaplain continued his comments,

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darkly hinting at the prevalence of what are usually called 'indecent or unnatural offences' and the consequent court-martials. The evidence had, he announced, disclosed a 'heartrending condition of affairs'. The other officers in the compartment refused to be drawn, but he evidently expected me as a doctor to take an interest in his remarks. He was a big, fine-looking man; from some remarks he made he was married and had rowed for his college at Oxford, and afterwards been a schoolmaster at a large public school before becoming a temporary chaplain. Presumably he considered himself to be what is called a 'sportsman'. Yet it did not seem sportsmanlike to dilate upon the moral delinquencies of men who would in a great number of cases have shortly to sacrifice their lives for the security of their fellow countrymen. It was hard that exaggerated statements of the 'terrible immorality in France' should be broadcast in England amongst anxious relatives of men who, being absent, could neither deny nor explain.

In matters of sex morals particularly, people can always find the scandals and the faults they are anxious to find and which are so amazingly profitable to expose and comment on in the Press. Indirectly, in the exposure of other people, we can minimize and excuse our own shortcomings. Certainly during fairly long service I had found that the ordinary soldier man is quite as moral as the average civilian.

The padre continued but I closed my eyes and allowed my thoughts to ramble. What *was* all this sex business—'The Englishman's Bogey'—the thing he was always whispering and giggling about? Puritans and Pharisees tried to forbid publishers or anyone to *speak* of what nearly everyone *did*. The tongue must be silent concerning the doings of the other members of the body. But substances otherwise innocuous become poisonous when

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covered up. Frankness and fresh air and sunlight killed all the infections and all the 'bogeys'.

Schoolboys in the rough-and-tumble of games—not in mechanical drill—had their trial flight for Life's larger struggles. Deprived, perhaps unwisely and too soon, of their mothers' arms, some found emotional experience with another schoolboy—an emotional trial-flight—before they tackled the elusive and dangerous female. An immaculate adolescent would probably make a shy, clumsy and unsuccessful lover for women afterwards. Besides, 'the female of each species is deadlier than the male'—one must not 'practise' on women; the results might be socially disastrous to both sides. And after adolescence? Well, the young soldier, like the undergrad, found his girl, unless he happened to be one of a small percentage which in each generation Nature turned out as more or less homosexual—a congenital tendency that was one of Nature's crude but quite effective forms of Birth Control. There were certainly not many of such people in the Army. In spite of the fact that young soldiers were herded together and unmarried, they were no more generally homosexual than an equal number of curates and parsons would be. So why this impeachment of the soldiery by a parson? Was he longing to talk to us about Sodom and Gomorrah, those enormously overrated and over-advertised resorts!

Plants and animals and men, when stress or privation threaten the extinction of themselves or their species, will hastily, even prematurely, 'cast their seed'. That last fling by the young conscript in the brothels of Swansea or Havre before he went up to the shambles at Ypres was due to an instinctive urge; for the very young soldier it was probably his *first* fling, as it might be his last. What more natural than to wish to exercise, once, that primal function before he plunged forever into Oblivion, before

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he passed into some frozen Eternity, fleshless, passionless, inhuman, and perhaps loveless. Was it so unreasonable to desire adult 'experience' before he was snuffed out as cannon-fodder or died from dysentery in the Dardanelles?

Soldiers were not literary people. They had few other outlets but sex for their emotional urge and their creative faculties; often they could afford no other. It was too easy for writers in the Press, who could express themselves and their emotions freely—some of them 'cast their seed' in columns of incontinent hysteria in the 'Daily Wail'—to deny humbler folk other means of expression and indulgence.

Then, we had used Fear too much—fear of hell fire, the whip, and prison, to force adolescents and young soldiers into an unnatural continence. It only made them deceitful, irritable, or over-addicted to solitary indulgences. Then there was the Fear of disease and of entanglements with 'gold-digging' and unscrupulous women. But venereal disease would have been stamped out generations ago had not ecclesiastics persuaded themselves and others that this disease was a special brand invented by the Almighty as a punishment for sex indulgence. 'God and the gonnooccus in a Holy Alliance.' How could even parsons have been so silly! Everyone knew now that venereal disease like most others was 'sent' as a punishment for failure to use soap and water, for it was the uncleanly, careless, unfastidious, and the ignorant who mostly suffered from it and who spread it about.

The roundabout wartime journey from Folkestone to London took many hours. Finally, near East Croydon we ran into a real November fog.

The chaplain, who had been discussing with the other

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officers in the carriage the delinquencies of Asquith and Lloyd George, the eccentricities of Rasputin and President Wilson, the shortage of man-power and the failure of conscription in Ireland, was back again on what seemed to be a favourite topic. Had we realized the numbers of officers and men in the V.D. Hospital at Havre?

'Oh, yes, Padre!' butted in one of the subalterns. 'We hear the patients have to fall in now by Companies, Regiments, and Brigades—Generals with syphilis on the right of the line, Chaplains with gonorrhœa on the left! The sheep and the goats!' A smile travelled round the compartment.

The chaplain looked cross and said something to the effect that we all ought to be more serious. But no one was going to be drawn. The fact is that a soldier, or any layman, who discusses religion, sex, disease, politics, free-will, economics or any serious subject with a chaplain is in danger of finding that the cleric, as soon as he is cornered in an argument, may describe his opponent to the other listeners as an 'atheist' or 'materialist' or some other question-begging epithet. He becomes personally rude or sarcastic, always a sign of defeat. But if a layman, officer or civilian, descends to the same level himself in an argument with a padre, or resorts to chaff, he will almost certainly be accused of not showing a 'proper respect' for their sacred calling as ministers of Christ! With this red-herring the man of God can ride off with an air of pontifical displeasure and pompous scorn of the dreadful 'unbeliever'—an unbeliever not of Christ's merciful and understanding teaching, but of the parson's infallibility.

Inevitably—I knew it was coming—he, this large well-fed and married chaplain, reminded the carriage that 'blessed are the pure in heart', and talked a good deal about 'virtue'. It was said that the Greek and Hebrew words which King James's bishops had translated

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as 'purity' and 'virtue' meant to Christ's contemporaries not so much bodily continence as singleness of mind, what we now called 'sincerity' and 'courage'. Certainly, sincerity and courage are more needed in our modern world than an intense and self-absorbed bodily continence which makes it advisable to suspect every young woman of being a Delilah, makes it necessary to keep so aloof and distant from your fellow men, away from every cocktail bar and music hall lest their evil friendship may corrupt your own stupendous purity. The Holy Spirit surely means a spirit of sweet reasonableness, an inspired intuitive understanding of others' difficulties and varying individual physical and mental needs, an imaginative sympathy and not a censorious desire to get other folk 'punished', a pharasaical rigidity about drink, gambling and sex that only repels. But it would be no use saying any of this to a padre. He would only be sarcastic concerning my very scanty knowledge of Greek.

To any doctor who has had to attend on married folk it is rather nauseating to hear a married man holding forth to youths and bachelors on the subject of sexual continence, so I made an effort to change the subject and asked the padre if he approved of compulsory church parades.

'Of course,' crushingly; 'don't you?'

He didn't see that the compulsion was not only a laughable contradiction in itself, but a reflection on the drawing power of the chaplains. If the 'personal' God, the Hebrew Chieftain that many parsons still worship, has a sense of humour, he must surely laugh loud and long at the Englishman's 'compulsory church parades'. 'Compulsory prayer!' This will be remembered against the English long after their Empire has dissolved: '11.30 a.m. in a gloomy sunless Gothic building on a day dedicated to the sun—that interesting and curious Eng-

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lish mania for a time-place compulsion for the Communion of their Saints'. Black was the emblem of grief and darkness, the symbol of disease and death, treachery, cruelty, ignorance and despair—and our parsons were dressed in black.

This large parson-man, so zealous and so well fed, was a type I had often met in pre-war days. He sensed opposition in our questions. 'Boys weren't flogged often enough nowadays' this follower of Gentle Jesus announced severely to one of the younger subalterns, who scowled at him.

He became emphatic about the peculiar virtues of flogging; gloating, as if he visualised the tightly-stretched buttocks over the birching-block. Splendid! Batchelorhood, he thought, was in any case certain to be sinful. His appraisal of the marriage state became rich, unctuous and massive. I only hoped he allowed his wife some say concerning the number of children he expected her to have.

Yet—there he was—one of those who help to make our laws and press opinion. Probably he wrote letters to *The Times* fulminating against the manners and morals of the young.

His kind would, if they could, persuade all and sundry into marriage, regardless of whether such unions were likely to be happy or produce more and more unwanted or abnormal children.

But what did he know or care about that? He was so certain about everything that he was sure of nothing, a Galatian bewitched by Tradition and Uniformalism who darkened his counsel by words without wisdom. But I felt that this mountainous 'wet bob' meant well—indeed he said so. An earnest man who had evidently persuaded himself that the Almighty—at least

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on festive or critical occasions—wore a Union Jack as a waistcoat. God bless his tiny heart and well-filled belly.

Chaplains more than other folk seemed to ignore the necessary effect of the War on men's general morality. Was it reasonable to suppose that morality or immorality of one kind or another lived in watertight compartments. The pre-War man-in-the-street was too often steeped in a commercial corruption that was perilously near cheating, and the same man now forced into the front line was being paid and trained to kill strangers. Perhaps he was a conscript and therefore forced to kill his fellow men without believing it was his moral duty to do so. When a man is forced to kill another man whom he does not feel morally compelled to kill, you are forcing him to be a murderer; and when, if he refuses to kill, you shoot him because he is insubordinate, you yourself are then surely twice a murderer. When one has to creep out and stab or strangle or otherwise do to death a fellow human being in the darkness of no-man's-land, one is bound to feel afterwards far less seriously about other forms of immorality, including dishonesty, cruelty and sex indulgence. The greater surely includes the less. 'Thou shalt do no murder' was a prohibition far older than Christianity; it is a fundamental law. Once—whatever our patriotic pretext—we Christians make a virtue of breaking that great prohibition and honour those who do it, and prattle about the Happy Warrior, all other and minor prohibitions must tend to become still more negligible.

But then a chaplain will urge: 'You forget that our men fight for a noble cause—the liberation of Belgium and the destruction of the German Fleet and German Imperialism. Surely that justifies their killing their fellow men in any way they can—especially in no-man's-

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land where both sides are intentionally treacherous and deceitful?"

Do these folk honestly think, as Christians or even as ordinary men, that anything, even the maintenance of one country's 'supremacy' as Mistress of the Seas or the destruction of that inconvenient rival trading concern, the German Empire, justified anyone creeping up to a complete stranger in the darkness of no-man's-land and strangling him with your knuckles forced against his windpipe or stabbing him repeatedly in the chest while your companion stifles his cries lest an enemy patrol should hear you?

'But,' urges our patriotic chaplain, 'the two men who go out to do this loathsome deed have been told that they are murdering for their God, King and Country, and so for the Right!'

True; but the man they are strangling or stabbing also believes he resists for the sake of his God, his King and Country.

It was midnight when the train reached Victoria. London was all darkness—the rain coming down in torrents, not a porter or a taxi to be seen. There was nothing for it but to shoulder one's baggage and walk to 96, Piccadilly or to any hotel that might have a vacant couch and a spare blanket. One of the other occupants of the train, a temporary Brigadier-General, joined me as I trudged up the Buckingham Palace Road. All the hotels there were full or commandeered as offices; 'two in every bed and several sleeping on the billiard tables', as the night porter at one of them told us. Out again in the rain; by the time we got to Buckingham Palace we were both drenched through and blown. Our sodden suitcases had got very heavy and the bad crossing had knocked the stuffing out of us; we had both been very sick on the

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boat and felt thoroughly miserable. Once I had gone down below to be sick and found a chaplain and two other officers, one very senior, all trying to be sick into the same basin.

Outside the Palace we decided to dump our bags against the railings and have a breather. There we sat hunched up in the rain and darkness and no one seemed to think it odd that two fairly senior officers, sodden and dishevelled, should be squatting on their baggage outside the King's Palace. There seemed to be no sentries, only an occasional policeman in an oilskin who took no notice of us. Eventually, tired and cold and wet to the skin, we got to Jermyn Street and shared a room in Cox's Hotel.

The next morning, feeling too seedy for another journey in wartime trains, I decided to stay in London. Apparently the long course of over-chlorinated water in the tea in France and the seasickness had got my digestion out of gear; I could barely swallow a cup of tea, and London seemed particularly grim and dreary. I lay in bed listening to the rain and reading the papers. There was something in the *Morning Post* about an address to recruits by a well-known and much-advertised bishop. He had hinted at forms of abnormality and immorality, the peculiar 'sinfulness' that had so troubled the chaplain from Havre.

Prolonged periods of terror like illness and stress are detrimental to normality, especially to the male, whose sex-normalcy is more vulnerable than that of women; but I cannot say I recollect noticing anything of this sort in France, perhaps because I was too unsuspecting to attach any significance to special signs of friendship, too busy to have time for those suspicions which appear to come so easily to some people that one suspects they

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thoroughly enjoy entertaining them. Certainly there are many reformers and good folk who get a vicarious pleasure out of enlarging upon the fancied indulgences of others and a kick out of denouncing their 'wickedness'. I do remember that one man who for a time acted as my messenger was very much attached to another private, and that when the latter was promoted to be corporal I warned the messenger that he must no longer sleep with his friend, because according to the rather inhuman rule of the Army there must be no sort of open friendship between corporals and privates. It was not unnatural that these two lads lying awake listening to the moan of approaching shells should prefer each other's close company. When we were being systematically shelled at night I almost wished myself that I had someone to share my dug-out; fear in solitude does so magnify itself. Lumley, the younger of the two, seemed particularly distressed at the separation; once afterwards I found him in tears. Because they were not much more than children I felt rather ashamed of myself for having so curtly ordered the cessation of their friendship. Personally, although an officer serving under me hinted otherwise—he was a zealous churchgoer—I do not believe there was anything more between them than an emotional comradeship. Perhaps like Frenchmen or like Achilles and Patroclus they kissed one another! It is certainly an oddity of our English culture that at school we were allowed to bully one another to our heart's content, but kissing would have been a flogging offence.

Anyway, Lumley and his friend are both dead now. Perhaps some Puritan will say with comfortable conviction that they are probably both in hell, where, as there are, presumably, no Puritans, their friendship would arouse no suspicions. If, on the contrary, hell is full of bitter and suspicious Puritans—and that would indeed

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make it hell—then the two friends may tread knee-deep together the blue fields of some Valhalla where friendship and affection can cover, as the scriptures of all religions tell us, 'a multitude of transgressions'—a Pagan Heaven where Krishna and Arjuna, Æneas and Achates, David and Jonathan, and other Good Companions of the long ago drink nectar with Gods that were born long before either Mrs. Grundy or a vindictive Jehovah; Gods who may, for all we know, even outlive that fantastic pair of Tribal Deities.

CHAPTER XXV

THE EARLY DOOR

Too many Englishmen shirking under the Whitehall umbrella,' bellowed Lord Northcliffe. Suspicion was abroad in 1917. Every fit man must be driven to the trenches. Some woman, his wife perhaps, could take his job and salary but he remained liable for her maintenance and debts. And all those young bachelors in the big camps that were springing up everywhere—would they be too attentive to his wife or his best girl in his absence? Ugly stories were brought back by men on leave—disturbing, heartless letters came from home—letters that men tried almost beyond endurance read and re-read with amazement and scorn. A shilling a day in the trenches for the boys and a pound a day for the girls in the munition factories who had persuaded—with a white feather—the boys to go. So fur coats, imitation pearls and a vicarious patriotism abounded, and before the men came back the women were to have the vote: they would see that beer was taxed, that in future the 'Bull and Bush' and the 'Bunch of Grapes' shut their doors earlier. The pub was the working man's club. Club indeed—what business had men to want clubs! Glorious beer! Not at all! It was better, the women decided, that men should spend their money on silk stockings for them than spend it with their cronies at a pub. Mr. Austen Chamberlain had thanked God that English men were not logical. English women could

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on occasion supply the logical deficiencies of the male.

Suspicion spread to France. Fierce rather relentless mental specialists arrived from England to see we did not malingering in the trenches. I was ordered to attend a conference of doctors; it degenerated into a lecture from a mental specialist who had 'visited' the trenches at least twice. Shell-shock, he sharply told us, was a fable, neurasthenia a myth. His ruthless contempt for a doctor who let any man down to the Base before he was actually mutilated was superb. After the lecture I told him of a man who, apparently uninjured by an explosion, was at that moment lying unconscious on a stretcher in my ambulance, his whole body so insensitive that sterilized needles could be driven an inch into his flesh; he lay breathing stertorously, his eyeballs insensitive to light or touch, his urine suppressed; the electric battery bringing no response. 'Was not this a case of genuine shell-shock?' I inquired humbly. 'Rubbish,' snorted the expert, 'shamming—seen hundreds the same.' His contempt for me was enormous, his asperity insolent, his acid sarcasm concerning my competence as a doctor covered an implied threat. I grew angry. A man, I suggested, capable of such an elaborate and well-sustained fraud was in any case wasted in the ranks—he should be posted to a responsible position in our Secret Service. I was reprimanded for being contumacious to an expert. Scornfully he left us—in a car—to lunch at Amiens, or to sleep at Rouen. Lucky dog! In the next war I must be an expert.

Suspicion filtered like a fog into 'every corner of our minds. During fairly long service I had remarked that soldiers often imperil their health by delaying to report sick; suspicion about their malingering was overdone. For instance, anyone who has hastily saddled up a restive

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horse in the darkness knows how easy it is to get a blow in the mouth sufficient to crack a dental plate. But a man without teeth would starve on Army biscuit, become too weak for active service. So 'accidents' like these were suspect, might even be tried by court-martial. 'Englishmen habitually dodge their duty—hence the necessity of Nelson's last moment appeal to his crews.' Do they! I had not noticed it! But then the expert had decided I was an unobservant fool.

Prolonged strain, want of sleep, and hardship produce in the young an exhaustion-anæmia which doctors call cachexia. Generals know better. 'Cachexia indeed!—I've never heard of that disease.' The Brass-Hat evidently rather suspected constipation or excessive masturbation. 'The youngsters' place was in the trenches, they had no business to be filling beds in hospital.

Young subalterns would be sent to us sick, so worn out they were barely able to stand, yet with no definite disease. 'Give him a purge,' the loud-voiced Brass-Hat suggested, 'and send him back to his unit—shamming!' Sometimes, the wretched boy's eyes would fill with tears, he would turn his face to the wall and his shoulders would heave. Shamming! He had not heard that shameful word or cried since preparatory school days. 'Shamming—am I!—I won't stand it.' Flushed and bitter he insists—stumbles away from the ambulance towards the trenches—better dead at Poteige or in the Rue Tilleloy than a target for unjust taunts.

'Oh, Blank—yes, poor chap—killed yesterday,' his adjutant remarks, 'he came back from your ambulance looking rather queer and dazed and walked right into a 5.9 at Dead Cow Corner.'

He had come out fresh and keen from Harrow, believing that this war—as his Housemaster had so often

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told him—was a glorious adventure, a wonderful opportunity for noble self-sacrifice—and, for a time, he had believed it. And now, well, the usual telegram of condolence to his parents—‘gave his life for his country’—at Dead Cow Corner.

Self-inflicted wounds, in wartime, are usually serious, and due to quite a different state of mind from that which induces a man to exaggerate a minor ailment. Of such wounds there must have been many thousands; the figures sometimes mentioned by officers at the War Office seemed scarcely possible. It was said that the Indian troops had a higher percentage than the British. If that was so it was understandable for in very many cases the Indians had been brought away from India more or less unwillingly. Even if at first willing to take part in the White Man's War, after a month or two of continued cold rain and heavy shelling their willingness tended to become a minus quantity. There were certainly many Indians at Netley and in other hospitals with a single penetrating wound in the palm of the right hand, which was difficult to account for unless their open hands had been exposed above the parapet. The number of these wounds amongst men in the same regiment was so striking that I questioned many of the convalescent Indian soldiers while I was there. To my surprise several made no attempt to deny that it had been a purposeful ‘accident’. They had, they said, lost interest in the War, or else resented having been recruited from their villages in India for the Burra-Wilayatka-Larai—as they called the War—by various forcible and unpleasant ‘persuasions’; they were suspicious as to the behaviour of their wives in their absence and the disposal of their crops.

It seems that the Lumbardars or head-men of Indian

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villages had been told they *must* produce so many recruits by a certain date otherwise they and their village would fall under the cold displeasure of the British Government in India; the same or even more vigorous measures, including the lash, appear to have been adopted to ensure a sufficiency of 'volunteers' in Egypt. Is a man, unwillingly conscripted for a war—a murder competition due to political muddling—which he strongly disapproves of, in which he believes he has no direct interest, guilty of any moral obliquity if he avoids enlistment, or decides to render himself unfit for a service forced upon him under threat of death? If we are to have a conscience at all about anything, conscience can hardly be put temporarily in abeyance in the vital and fundamental question of killing others for the convenience and support of those whose temperament and interest inclines them to fight.

Naturally everything was done to make life unpleasant for those who had self-inflicted wounds. They were court-martialled, imprisoned, bullied, insulted and underfed; and as their number ominously increased the doctoring of their wounds was carried out, not at home, but in rough and ready fashion in buildings well within range of the German guns.

The first man I saw deliberately wound himself was an infantryman standing beside me at Plogsteert in October, 1914. At the time we were being fairly heavily shelled, and many enemy bullets were passing through a wooden shed near by and ricochetting about amongst the trees. Deliberately putting the muzzle of his rifle on his right foot the man pulled the trigger and blew away part of his boot and some of his toes. It was only by chance I saw him do it, for a man with his arm in a sling, who was sitting on a bank on the other side of me got a bullet in

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his leg almost at the same minute. I was about to attend to him, but just happened to turn round at the moment and saw the deliberate action of the man on my right.

'What did you do that for?'

No answer.

'You know that that is a very serious offence. What is your regiment?'

'Second Battalion Blankshire Light Infantry.'

'Well, I shall mark your wound label "S.I." (self inflicted) in red pencil, and you will probably be tried by a court-martial. You had better get your boot off and dress your wound with your own First Field dressing. I have plenty to do with people who have not blown their own toes off.'

The man sullenly obeyed. Then using his rifle as a support he began to hobble off in the rain through Ploegsteert Wood towards the main road. When he had gone about twenty yards into the wood I saw him tear off the accusing wound label and deliberately throw it into the bushes. Naturally, he was not going to carry back if he could help it such a damning piece of evidence. I was far too busy to worry about what happened to him afterwards.

Though that day we had a great number of genuine casualties, now and again I suspected from the appearance of some of the wounds I dressed that quite a few had been inflicted 'by arrangement' with a comrade. Several, for instance, were in the buttock, a fairly safe place to be wounded, and the clothing was scorched as if the firing had been at very close range; yet for the greater part of the day the Germans had been two or three hundred yards from us.

Self-inflicted wounds were apt to be numerous just after some unsuccessful attack, or just before a really big push. The accusation of S.I. was often unjustly made and

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accepted. Two men working in a dark sap or tunnel, one digging immediately behind the other in a cramped position, would damage with his pick the heel, calf, thigh or buttock of the man immediately in front of him. Sometimes both were punished for conspiracy and self-inflicted wounds though it might easily be a genuine accident.

One of the cases of self-inflicted wound brought into the Ambulance near Guillemont during the fighting on the Somme in January, 1917, made an impression on me because the man concerned had been a schoolmaster in private life and was evidently not only well educated but of the highly-strung intellectual type that used to be called 'refined'. He had really tried to commit suicide in the trenches, but had only succeeded in inflicting a rather ugly wound. He arrived at the Ambulance in a state of collapse from loss of blood and exposure after having been carried for miles through the mud and snow in a bitter wind. He was, in fact, nearly frozen to the stretcher with the blood oozing from his bandaged chest.

Surrounded by hot-water bottles, he lay on the operating table having sips of weak tea while his wound was being dressed. Gradually he revived. His chest wall was damaged, but the lung unperforated. He had tried to shoot himself in the heart with a rifle, rather a difficult job. Unaware at first that the wound was self-inflicted, I talked to him about his wound. He was quite frank and only regretted that he had not made a 'better job of it'. He had been up in the line between Sailly-Sallisel and Le Transloy in front of Morval and Les Boeufs—always a dreary waste and at that time a veritable slough of despond strewn with unburied corpses.

'It was the awful uncertainty. I could not stand the suspense any longer,' he said. 'After all, we all have to die some time or other, and feeling—with my nerves gone—quite useless as a soldier, I decided I would leave

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by the "early door". It was the terrible waiting—waiting to be mutilated, and then the squalor, vermin and discomfort, the unending noise and stench, and this awful winter in that half frozen mud; and the awful things some of our men did to the wounded Germans and to prisoners after they had surrendered. I wanted to get away from things so vile, a world that can be so foul.'

I tried to cheer him up.

'Oh, but things are improving! The War won't last for ever, and when we can get you well again you will be able to go home After the War. . . .'

'Home! It won't be home for me—now! Only the hospital for Self-Inflicted Wounds on the Mont-des-Cats, and a court-martial.'

From something he said, evidently his domestic affairs at home were not going satisfactorily. 'I've been told,' he added, 'that all the roughest and most callous of the hospital orderlies and doctors are put in charge of the S.I. wounds.'

By the time the ambulance had arrived at Trones Wood Aid Post to remove the wounded, it was fairly evident that the would-be suicide was going to 'get away' for good and all. The special instructions I gave to the orderly which he overheard may have confirmed his own suspicions.

'I suppose, doctor, I am going west?' he whispered. 'Perhaps they'll have as bad an opinion of me Over There as they would have had at the hospital at Mont-des-Cats. I haven't been particularly good.'

'Don't worry,' I said, 'you'll be all right, wherever you go.'

'But hardly fit company for the saints, doctor.'

My conviction has always been that men and women win their sainthood through suffering rather than piety. Because of what that man had suffered I felt that he was

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nearer to Christ than I should ever be. I told him so, and now I am glad I did.

After all, suicide was but a slight anticipation of his inevitable end. The only object in anyone remaining on here when we are weary of life must be that by remaining we suppose we may in some way lighten the burden of our fellows. Seeing out our life to its bitter end instead of departing by the early door may perhaps carry our own evolution a stage further forward, and in our own progress consciously or unconsciously we may assist the evolution of those around us.

Probably by the time anyone has suffered sufficiently to make up his or her mind to shorten his life such evolution as he was capable of has been already accomplished; he will not only make no further progress, but by cynicism and disgust with life help rather to retard than to advance the progress of his neighbours. The Lust-of-Living is our strongest passion; it is the animal instinct—the selfish Will-to-Live that brought ‘death into the world and all our woe’. The overcoming of this, the strongest human passion, by the intending suicide is itself some proof that such evolution as he or she is capable of, has been attained.

If often it is madmen or hypersensitive, temperamentally unstable persons who are suicidal, this only confirms the supposition that in these particular individuals no further earthly evolution is possible. Yet if we provided the unhappy with a rose-scented lethal chamber there might be an inconveniently long queue outside.

Going up from Ginchy to a Regimental Aid Post near Le Transloy that same December night in a raw mist and sleet, a sergeant and I lost our way in front of Les Boeufs in a desolate waste of deep mud, rusty wire, and shell

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holes full of filthy water. Above us, amidst the ruins of Morval and Les Bocufs, our guns growled and flashed incessantly. It was only when a shell exploded close by that we caught brief glimpses through the gloom of the desolation and ruin that spread all around. Many of the duckboards had disappeared; others splintered by shells or tilted up were now half sunk in the mud. In our greasy trench-boots we sliddered about in the darkness, constantly falling or slipping off the boards into craters and deep lakes of mud where in many places, if one had been alone, it would have been quite easy to drown. Facing us, along that ghastly road that stretched on the horizon from Le Transloy to Sailly, the German guns flared and pulsed. The raw winter mist hung like a curtain over this half frozen, flash-lit inferno of death and squalor. Now and again, through the murk, guided by the flashes from the German guns and the flicker of star-shells, we caught sight of our goal—the skyline of blackened tree stumps along the Le Transloy road. It was here in the darkness and thick mist, half-blinded by the flurries of driving rain and sleet, that we lost all trace of the duckboards, blundering into an area that smelt horribly, stumbling about for hours amongst rotting corpses. At last we reached the front line to find we had spent nearly half the night covering about three miles. In the Aid Post I thought of that suicidal schoolmaster in the Infantry. I had not, like him, been compelled to stay amidst the desolation, or I might have found the 'early door' more tempting. It was wonderful, with revolvers and rifles so handy, that more didn't commit suicide.

But there were other and more deliberate forms of escape from filth and fatigue, the horrors and nerve-wracking suspense of war. One of these was to contract venereal disease, a very easy 'way out'—another was to

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accuse a comrade, officer or man, of a crime against morality in which perhaps you were yourself implicated. This probably meant a court-martial for both of you. Court-martials for this form of misdemeanour were often held at Havre or some other base far from the front line. If the scheme was successful, one or both of those implicated in the alleged offence would rely on getting two years imprisonment for 'indecent' to be spent in Wormwood Scrubs or some other English prison. Now the conspirators quite reasonably hoped that at the end of their 'two years' in prison the War would almost certainly be over! So one or both would have thus saved their lives. No indecent act need *necessarily* have been committed.

As for the disgrace of this real or fictitious impropriety, they would argue that if England lost the War the crashing of a great Empire would obliterate the importance of this or that piece of misconduct or alleged indecent; or it could then easily be denied as only 'another piece of Army confusion and incompetence' and rank injustice. On the other hand, if we won the War—in the joy of the National Victory, in a burst of generous gratitude, one might hope for merciful oblivion or, at least, amnesty for those who had served as soldiers. The excitement of victory or the general demoralization in defeat might be equally effective in obliterating memories of 'misbehaviour'. At the worst the two young officers or privates concerned could always look forward to changing their name and emigrating after the War to America or one of the captured German colonies, there to begin their lives afresh, safe and sound, unwounded in body and saved from all the ageing strain and illnesses due to war privations. No doubt their memories would be more or less dishonoured amongst those of their comrades (perhaps not many—perhaps none!) who survived and

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possessed retentive memories and vindictive tongues. There was certainly quite a good chance that all those concerned in the actual trial might become casualties as the years rolled on. In the chaos and confusion following victory or national defeat there was also the chance that even the records and statements made at the trial might be lost or destroyed, or deliberately abstracted by a confederate or a relative who did not wish his family disgraced.

Lying half asleep in a cold, verminous, and badly lit leave-train in France, full of young officers who like myself were returning from leave to the trenches, I actually overheard four or five youngsters, who perhaps supposed I was also junior and temporary, discussing possibilities of this method of getting a little rest from the trenches. They were at no pains to lower their voices.

'I've had two years of the War, and that's as much as I can stand. I intend to get out of it this time even if I have to arrange to be caught red-handed in somebody else's bunk!' The speaker, a youngster with his Army cap pulled jauntily over one ear, looked as if he meant what he said.

Another one asked if there was not already a 'lot of "our" fellows in Wormwood Scrubs for sexual "misdemeanours"'—whether 'our' referred to pre-War cronies or to brother officers wasn't clear. A third who appeared to know several who were there by name, said jestingly:

'Oh yes! Blank, whose cousin is the doctor at the gaol, told me there were so many there already they were putting two in each cell!'

I felt I ought not to have listened, and anyway was disinclined to take these scraps of conversation seriously or to proclaim my seniority and threaten those youngsters with exposure. They would most likely have sworn

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they were only joking. But suppose they brazenly admitted the truth of my accusation, then this admission might itself have ensured for them the comparative safety of the prison they so evidently desired! Perhaps they knew I was senior and hoped I would report them. So they scored either way. I knew what a return to the trenches meant for a young conscript, and seeing how determined many of them were to get out of it at all costs, what use would such fed-up youngsters have been in any case in an action! They appeared from their conversation to be cynical, bitter, and rather desperate, so they might easily, instead of a bogus sexual misdemeanour, have chosen to have in that compartment a non-fatal 'accident' at their own expense with their revolvers. And with four friendly witnesses in the railway carriage to prove how 'genuine' the 'accident' was, they would be under no suspicion as to motive.

At Poperinghe I mentioned what I had heard to our A.P.M. I expected indignation. To my surprise he only shrugged his shoulders; apparently the ruse was already known.

Righteous indignation has been wasted because our men were given a big tot of rum before being launched across a corpse-strewn desert of mud, barbed wire, and bursting shells to attack the German trenches. But is it not rather a compliment that a man is *not* prepared to stab and bludgeon a perfect stranger to death until he has been excited or drugged with alcohol? No one who has not waited with troops on one of those dreadful dawns, chilled to the bone in a sodden trench, for that desperate gamble with death, for the faint whistle that orders them into the shambles, can judge whether it is or is not practicable to send men 'over the top' quite sober, when their hands and feet are numb and they are already cold and

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tired and wet. I have seen them so despondent and tired just before an attack that they leaned heavily against the side of the trench and would scarcely look one another in the face. One almost felt that some of those who were sober were ashamed of what they were about to do.

If it be only Dutch courage that comes with the warm tingle of rum in the stomach, even Dutch courage is better than none. On the average the courage of an English infantryman is high compared with that of many other races, but even his courage is not an inexhaustible commodity. Every English sea-going officer is aware that when things go too badly at sea a double guard has to be placed on the arms and the liquor room. Alcohol raises again the blood pressure that has been too much lowered by fear and chill. Without this pressure, neither brain nor muscle in many folk will function efficiently.

The hideous danger about drink in battle is that men who have been doped are unlikely to behave decently or to obey any of the rules of war—unlikely to spare some badly wounded and helpless 'enemy' who has thrown down his arms and begs for mercy from his fellow men. Unimaginable brutality is bound to happen. Doped with alcohol and half mad with excitement and fear, a man may at one moment be doing something amazingly reckless, at the next something unspeakably and quite unnecessarily brutal.

It would only be nauseating to describe all that happens; one hardly dare think of it. Let those who, quite sober, are full of patriotic ardour and crowd to their windows when the brass bands and the Guards in busbies and the war flags go by, not shut their eyes to this.

One way to avoid war, so easy that no one will take it, would be to forbid offensive insinuations about foreign nations in our so-called 'news' papers. Sneering xeno-

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phobia was a hundred times more poisonous than details of divorce cases, from which at least the public learnt something of the danger of hasty marriage, the prevalence of mental and physical incompatibilities and abnormalities, and of unreasoning selfishness and extravagance.

If we or any other nation fight again we must fight to a finish, whatever the brutality. Our ruthlessness to defeated Germany will in the next war recoil upon our heads. It will surely be no worse to be exterminated than to be enslaved for generations to pay 'just' reparations imposed by ruthless victors 'for moral purposes'. So those who still delight in calling war the 'Great Adventure' should understand what must happen *to them*, rules or no rules; then they might keep a few places in the front line in the next war for the Press lords, jingoes, editors, and blustering politicians.

CHAPTER XXVI

PROPAGANDA

Sometimes, during our attack on Pilkem and Langensmarck in 1917, as I stood watching the rather mournful processions of German prisoners coming back towards the cages near the front line, I couldn't help feeling rather ashamed of our lies about an enemy who was brave. These prisoners, bareheaded, their uniforms torn and dusty, many of them wounded, staggering along as pale as death, had been facing the murderous thunder of our artillery preparation for days on end, unable to get food, subjected to the terrible mental and bodily strain of the terrific and prolonged shelling of our massed artillery—now so plentiful that literally for miles our guns were lined up in series, their wheels almost touching. The thunder of our prolonged bombardment and the tremendous creeping barrages under cover of which our men had advanced had been deafening even to ourselves; the very ground had rocked. And these haggard groups were the remnants of whole brigades and divisions we had practically annihilated. They looked so ill, so strained, worn out and thin, their eyes still wide open as in a fixed terror, and yet they marched in over the ploughed-up ground keeping step, rank behind rank. Though many tottered and some even fainted in the ranks, there was no disorder. The senior would salute me.

'Sir! Your orders! Shall we go back with stretchers

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to the battlefield and pick up the wounded, or have you any other work for us here?"

'Work!' 'Back to the battlefield!' They asked for it, and after that ordeal!

'No,' I sometimes said, stung to admiration in spite of our hate-propaganda. 'You can let your men sit down for a little. We may get you some food when some comes up.' Later, I found many of them, without my orders, were helping my own stretcher-bearers to load the ambulance wagons, doing so willingly and cheerfully.

These are things—whatever the newspapers may have said about 'Huns and fiends'—that one does not forget.

Near Basseville (La Fromentière Farm) during the Battle of the Marne, I was with Major Tom Bridges when we found lying in a ditch a wounded German guardsman who had been, so he told us, a member of the Berlin Fire Brigade, and hailed from Posen. He was badly wounded and as it was raining we got him on to a gate and carried him into an adjoining farmhouse where I dressed his wounds. The youngster, a golden-haired blue-eyed giant, sobbed like a child when we told him we must go and leave him with the French. He insisted that I should look at a bundle of letters and two photographs in his pocket, one of the girl he had only just married, and another of his mother. He kissed them both and cried over them. The letters which he begged me to read were, I could see, loving and pathetic, full of questions about his food, health, and underwear. Both mother and the young wife were—the letters said—praying day and night for his safety.

'But I shall never see *meine Liebbling* again,' he said, the tears welling up in his eyes. I assured him that he would.

'Not if you leave me here,' he said. 'The French will murder me though I am helpless. They hate me!'

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The French farm people but too evidently did. They refused to listen to my directions for this lad's treatment; they were merely insolent when I mentioned food for him. The Major and I discussed what could be done, but time pressed and we had to leave him. As I passed out of the gate a woman with a chopper in her hand was shouting abuse at us for having brought a 'filthy Boche' into her farm; but he would soon be 'dead meat' she cried out triumphantly. I turned back and angrily threatened her. 'The wounded German might, I said, be able to give us valuable information. A member of the French General Staff, I pretended, would be calling at the farm the next day to cross-examine the man, and she would be in hot water if the wounded man was not alive and fit to answer all the questions that would be put to him. She did not believe me; I only received a fresh torrent of abuse and was scornfully reminded that France was *her* country and not mine! Possibly, the man was finished off in the farm. I am afraid in any case his chances of seeing his girl wife or mother again were pretty poor. Did they in their turn get killed with a bomb or go under from semi-starvation?

As Mr. Bernard Shaw reminds us, while not everyone is worth loving none are worth hating. Propagandist lessons in hatred merely stultify the haters. People who 'see red' seldom can see anything else clearly—until it is too late.

Propaganda literally followed us about! Morning, noon and night, we were officially informed that the Germans were fools, cowards, and fiends, unscrupulous barbarians, drunken vandals, degenerate Huns. Yet the streams of prisoners that began to come through neither looked nor behaved like fools and degenerates.

Was it supposed that propaganda made our men braver? It could scarcely fail to make them more brutal,

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caddish and ruthless; thus its ultimate effect would only be to discourage the German troops from surrendering, for no one surrenders to an enemy who has been made cruel by believing his own propaganda.

Those in a position to know assure us that every government in Europe had got ready pigeon-holed, for use as propaganda, an invented series of horrible tales concerning the poisoning of wells, the raping of small children and nuns, the ham-stringing of cattle, the abuse of the white flag and the Geneva Convention, desecration of tombs and churches and the burning down of orphanages, convents, schools and hospitals. In each of these 'little histories' the names of the perpetrator and his nationality and the places where they were supposed to occur has been left blank, so that when a declaration of war against Germany, England, Russia or France had been definitely decided upon, these hideous propagandist tales, with the appropriate names and nationalities inserted, could without a moment's delay be launched broadcast upon a more or less pacific and scandalized world; and the desired result, 'war fever', would thus be obtained within forty-eight hours. And if this could be done in the green tree as mere preparatory propaganda, what was likely to be done in the dry wood of a prolonged life and death struggle, spurred by the fear of possible defeat? Naturally, there would be no limit then to the lies and exaggerations with which the whole world and especially neutral nations would be deluged with incitements to reprisals and brutality.

The starvation of the German people, the 'economic blockade' of Germany as it was politely called, would not affect so much the German front-line troops—they must, anyhow, be fed and have bandages and dressings for their wounds, and warm overcoats—as the women, children, old folk and invalids of Germany. There could be

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nothing very stimulating to any decent man in the feeling that you were engaged in a vast effort to starve non-combatants and children.

'My country, right or wrong.' 'All is fair in love and war.' These have been our English slogans. 'All!' So lying propaganda is 'fair' and starving women and children, treachery, poison gas, torpedoing hospital ships, incendiarism, plunder, rapine and terrorism must be included in that 'all'. The lies spread by propaganda may be far more cruel and harmful to an enemy than poisoning his wells or sinking his hospital ships.

If it was profitable and 'patriotic' to distort, exaggerate and lie in 1915 in order to win the War, why should it cease to be 'patriotic' to lie about the American debt or Russia or India or French foreign policy—or anything else in 1925 or 1932—in order to 'win the Peace'?

We boasted we were the best at camouflage in Europe. But wasn't camouflage just a painted or an acted lie? Weren't we getting much too expert at it? Our line of red-coated ploughboys had rolled back the French guard at Waterloo without any deceit or camouflage; must we *now* depend on propaganda that camouflaged our own actions and intentions?

Propaganda only made us more capable of behaving towards the Germans in a way similar to that in which our propagandists had at first more or less untruthfully alleged the German behaved towards us. Thus the enemy is, in this most vicious of vicious circles, actually provoked into brutal reprisals that may exactly resemble those which we have at first suggested were habitual to him. The propagandist then triumphantly shouts: 'There, I told you so! You see what I said three months ago about these "Huns", which you said then wasn't true, is now proved to be true!'

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Those wounded German Dragoons at Monccl, fearing 'torture by the English', had themselves broken the rules of war in order to assure their own immediate extermination by us!

The apologists for propaganda concerning the enemy's 'brutality' explain that it discouraged the desertion or surrender of our troops in our numerous wars, but were we really so much afraid of Englishmen surrendering!

Our fanciful poster portraying a German nurse deliberately spitting into the drinking water of a wounded English soldier, and other propaganda, had an embittering effect. When in June, 1915, we brought trainloads of German wounded down to Havre, they had to be protected from the crowds of French roughs and fishwives there. Judging by their threats and actions, especially the women (some of them climbed into the train) they were prepared to finish off the German wounded lying in the cots with the long knives they used to clean the fish. They had been incensed and embittered by wild propagandist tales concerning Belgian babies and raped nuns.

Propaganda made us not only inhuman but absurdly suspicious. Two frightened peasants who had removed some 'souvenirs' from an 'abandoned' château—a habit of which we ourselves were not always guiltless!—were caught and shot twenty-four hours afterwards by the French because they were suspected of spying, but a French officer present told me there was only 'suspicion'.

One day in an isolated spot on the heights above the Aisne I noticed fresh footmarks leading to a cave. I shouted in English, French, and German, but got no reply. From inside there came only sounds of scampering and a draught of cold air as if from an opening on the far side, which I judged might be in full view of the German guns as well as of our bridges across the Aisne,

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which they were shelling. I obliterated the footmarks. An hour later I found fresh tracks. Spies were known to be inside our lines, and our C.O. thought this worth looking into.

Returning with Gal, our interpreter, a corporal and three men, one armed with a bayonet, we entered. Gal insisted that as it was I who had found the spies, I ought to go first. Gingerly we advanced along the narrow tunnel. The man immediately behind me, his finger on the trigger, kept jumpily pushing the muzzle of his loaded rifle into my back. I began to curse my curiosity about footmarks. Close behind, Gal also kept fidgeting with his revolver; behind him was our rearguard, the man with the bayonet. The third man and the corporal we ordered to remain outside on the cliff to watch the numerous exits from other caves on the hillside.

'Who goes there?' in French and German brought no reply, only further scampering. Then the rocky narrow tunnel widened out. In a whispered counsel of war we discussed whether one man should be sent back to bring up reinforcements. Gal considered our position dangerous, the faint daylight behind making us an easy target; and if we lit the lantern we had brought, or fired, the flash would show us up still more clearly, and we should get a volley from the persons concealed. The echo of a falling stone we dislodged suggested we were in a large cavern. Could enemy machine-gunners be concealed there to emerge during a night attack behind the British lines? Finally, it was decided that the two men with the rifle and bayonet should go first and one should fire if our next challenge was not answered. In changing places, the man with the bayonet somehow ran the point into a very tender part of Gal's anatomy, whereat he began to complain bitterly and with unnecessary emphasis. Then our leading man fired; the reverberation of the shot in the

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cavern was terrific, the echoes seeming to be travelling for miles, coming back to us like the sound of distant shouting. *Was it shouting?* Might we not in this cave be right under some German trenches!

The sound of hurrying feet became louder and a lot of earth and grit fell down on us from the roof. We decided to risk it and light the lantern. The draught blew out the first match, the man clumsily spilling all the matches on the floor. The lantern lit showed up the rocky walls of a large cavern from which radiated many tunnels and galleries. From floor to ceiling the walls were lined with huge cages of wire netting—every cage containing hundreds of *rabbits*. The French believe that rabbits fatten more rapidly in the dark, and we had been tracking their caretaker! We had hardly realized our absurd mistake when a strong gust of cold air put out the lantern. Feeling complete fools we groped our way out, nearly getting lost in the narrow passages.

A few days afterwards, several men of the British Infantry entered one of these caves and were never seen again. In Villefranche-sur-Mer in July, 1930, an officer of the 24th Chasseurs Alpins who are stationed there told me that he and some of his men in 1916 had found the bones and rifles of four English soldiers in one of these caves. He assumed they had been wounded, or were perhaps attempting to desert, or had gone in to explore and then, lost in the labyrinths, had starved to death.

We got well chaffed about the rabbits. For a long time Gal insisted on calling me 'le chasseur des lapins'.

Propaganda suggested that the Germans were responsible for all the looting, but we also occasionally 'looked for souvenirs', and the French would make difficulties about giving receipts for valuables. One evening in October, 1914, during the northwards race to save the

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Channel Ports, the H.Q. of the Regiment was in a doctor's house in Hartennes. The Germans, it was said, did not spare houses whose owners had abandoned them, but they did not seem to have done much damage here. The careful doctor, before abandoning the house to the oncoming Germans, had even rolled up the carpets; he was supposed to be a wealthy man, and always suspected of having hidden large sums of money in his house. Our interpreter thought much of the disorder in the house was due to curiosity on the part of the less honest of his neighbours, of whom many were still in the village.

We saw little sign of the miser's wealth except a large library. The house was cold, the doors wouldn't shut properly, many of the windows were broken, and all the fireplaces smoked abominably. Then a subaltern discovered that the literature in the doctor's library was largely devoted to sex problems. Many of the medical books demonstrating forms of sex aberration were profusely illustrated with photographs from life. It would be an understatement to say that some of us were mildly interested. But the draughts and the smoky fireplaces drove us out to search for an estaminet that was still functioning. When we came back we heard that the O.C., who was always interested in books, had found in the library a book on Amiens Cathedral, between the pages of which lay concealed many thousand franc and hundred franc notes, worth then four or five times their present value. Surprised at this discovery, he had been through several others and had shaken out notes representing a very large sum of money. Considering there were no locks on any of the doors of the house and no caretaker, the O.C. decided to send the money to the Mayor of Amiens with the doctor's name and the position of the house and the circumstances in which it had been found. Apparently, the Mayor accepted the treasure trove but

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refused to give a receipt. Did the absentee doctor eventually receive his money in full? Or was it charged up against 'German looting'? Or was the owner told the 'wicked English' had only handed over a very small sum?

When we had entered Longueval we found many wounded in the village—the Curé, the good Abbé Georges Ronseaux, had twenty-one, mostly French, in his house. In another house we found three German doctors and two German orderlies attending to a young German who had been shockingly wounded; one hip joint and the buttocks had been almost completely shot away. I was asked by a Staff officer if three doctors were really necessary, or was it just an excuse—spying? Or an intention to be taken prisoner? I fear because of what I did not say but ought to have said that the three doctors and even their wretched patient did not get the consideration they should have done. I ought to have been more humane and less suspicious, more true to my profession and more indifferent to the foul war propaganda. Like the others, I had been incensed with lies about German soldiers raping nuns, cutting off children's hands and tongues, 'toasting Belgian babies' on their bayonets, and all the other tripe. It was this accursed 'patriotic' propaganda that made it easy to fail in our duty to God and man, to be callous and rather merciless.

The evil tendency of propaganda to produce the very behaviour on *both* sides which it denounced might have been reduced if the reports of the occasionally generous actions of our enemies had been made more public and not hushed up. The incident that was reported during the fighting in the Dardanelles, when the Turkish Commander sent through the British Fleet a message to the British troops to say that many English wounded had been lying out without water for days in the blistering

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heat between the opposing lines, was hushed up for a long time. The Turks with a humanity that is a credit to Mahomedanism and to their race, suggested they should cease fire for two hours and permit English stretcher-bearers and doctors to go right over as far as the Turkish lines and collect all the English wounded. The offer was accepted, and the Turk faithfully kept his promise though, unavoidably, some of our stretcher-parties obtained valuable knowledge concerning the Turkish position.

To the discredit of Europe, our alleged 'Christianity', and boasted civilization, this was apparently almost the only occasion during four and a half years of barbarity in which one side risked the discovery by the enemy of valuable information for the sake of getting relief for their wounded enemies. One wishes that it had been an English and not a Turkish Commander who had set this example. Among the several injunctions of Mahomet, Christians ignore those against usury and the use of strong liquor, and are not always very scrupulous about the necessity of 'cleansing the body before prayer', but there is one Mahomedan injunction concerning the imperative necessity of showing mercy that we might observe more often.

An English admiral has related how, in order to induce the Greeks to break their neutrality and permit our troops to operate against Austria from Greek soil, we brought a shipload of corpses into Athens and pretended they were Greeks drowned by the action of an Austrian submarine, although in actual fact they had met their death in quite another way. Other naval officers have pointed out that, so far from the German submarine commanders being always merciless, they were, in many cases, almost foolishly considerate, allowing the crews of merchant ships with concealed guns that had opened fire

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on their submarines (thereby destroying their right to be treated as non-combatants) to escape in their boats, after being given time to collect compasses, provisions, signal rockets, and clothing. Because of this, many of these boats reached England, and from them our Admiralty gradually accumulated information, so that the position, area of operations, usual tactics, and the numbers of submarines operating became known, helping us very materially to defeat the Germans' best chance of victory.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FEW CHAPLAINS . . . AND CHANCE

For a thousand years the Power of Jehovah and the Name of Christ have been invoked by priests in aid of tribal armies marching on the roads to slaughter, weakening those commands concerning mercy, love and forgiveness, which are or were once associated with personal Gods.

'Now, as ever,' once said a great Frenchman, reminding his hearers that it was a High Priest who contrived the murder of Christ, 'the priest is God's worst enemy.' Even if that were true the average soldier in France saw little of the priest. He was for the most part left alone in his struggle to reconcile what was irreconcilable—appeals to the Prince of Peace for comfort, and support for those about to destroy their fellow men on account of trade jealousy, national hatreds, and political rivalries.

'In thirty minutes you go over the top, my men, in a big attack on the Hindenburg Line. Good luck to you, and don't forget! You are captained by Christ!' It was a chaplain speaking. Now at that uncomfortable moment all of us except the Chaplain had got to be up there; it was specially plucky of him to come up of his own accord at such a moment to encourage the men. But was that chaplain afraid to go on and say: 'Remember, my lads, as you pull the smoking blade of your bayonet out of one man's liver and thrust it in lower down, transfixing the

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bladder and sex organs of him or another, remember, boys, as your victim shouts in agony—Christ is helping you!’ No! He would hardly dare to say that! But could he be quite such a fool as to think that that thought or something like it was not running on in the minds of some of his listeners? There is a question mark chaplains never seem to see. What are the ultimate implications of their most cherished slogans?

I do not even remember to have seen a chaplain (except three at Pradelles on October 11th, 1914) between our arrival in France in August, 1914, and the finish of the Battle of Loos in September, 1915. After that we began to meet chaplains of various kinds and types. One I specially remember because I really admired and liked him. He was one of several that were attached at different times to the unit. Sometimes, we had as many as three living in our mess.

He represented, I think, the United Free Churches, and so was the representative of the Nonconformist community. Quiet and agreeable, he never, like some of his colleagues, boasted of having been ‘right up’ in the front line, though in indirect ways I discovered that he had often been a good deal nearer the German trenches than most people. He never had to be sent for; he was always there. Unassumingly he did his duty.

I never heard that the chaplains made any attempt to restrain the brutality of feeling and intemperate language about our enemies, whose trespasses were being systematically exaggerated. We should all of us have respected them so much more if they had. They were, from what I heard and saw, if anything rather more bitter and vindictive about the enemy than the rest of us.

The Church of England, or ‘Anglican’ chaplains or ‘priests’ or whatever they are now to be called were sometimes ‘tremendous soldiers’.

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Occasionally when I was asked to reprimand a man for failing to salute a chaplain, I would kick.

'You say this man did not salute you, Captain Redos?' (Their military titles were considered important.) 'But you never salute me although I am for the time being your commanding officer.'

'Oh, that's *quite* a different thing,' Captain R. would exclaim. 'I am calling upon them to show respect for the Church of Christ and for Religion!'

I wondered why in that case our chaplains did not insist on every man saluting all the roadside calvaries and crucifixes which we so frequently passed, as well as the Roman Catholic padres of the college we were billeted in!

But it is an elementary mistake to confuse religion with chaplains and churches. The inadequacy, even the misbehaviour, of a few chaplains, the obvious insincerity of a few priests or self-advertising press-bureaued bishops craving for social recognition, a court decoration or political power in this or that organized church, did not really influence the average soldier's innermost thoughts. There was one question which in war or in peace must always remain: 'Does our desire for better things indicate that somewhere they can or might exist?' Does it promise the certainty of their eventual achievement, or is this yearning but one of nature's specious tricks to ensure more and more procreation to carry on evolutionary progress towards the fulfilment of something indifferent and quite non-moral, the Racial Destiny?

How often we sat and discussed 'chances', the chances of a wound not too crippling. It seemed incredible that risks, unlike slow poisoning with antimony or arsenic were not cumulative, that the danger on your 301st day under fire were no greater than on your first. It seemed

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unlikely you would be hit on your first day; and yet the newcomer, *other things being equal*, ran as big a risk—so the mathematicians said—as the veteran who had been three years in France. The veteran's war risk was only a sum in addition, not in multiplication. But were other things ever quite equal? The newcomer might be rash, or custom might make the veteran imprudent or his nerves, frayed by prolonged strain, might cause him to run into danger.

The universal conviction, that if a certain risk is taken often enough it must materialize at last, seems so reasonable; but as the light, enemy's marksmanship and other factors varied, each day's risks were not the mere repetition of previous dangers but the commencement of a new series. Seated on the canal bank I could just see over my right shoulder Hell-for-Leather Lane, a short strip of road at right angles to the German line. Everything that passed upon it they could see, and they could reckon almost to a yard where to burst their shell. Before dark it was forbidden, but it saved such a long detour that we habitually disobeyed the order. Three times one morning we had been just missed. The first shell had fallen in a field on our right and rather upset the crew of one of our howitzers. The second 'swoop' had come a bit nearer and burst in the hedge on the same side of the road. The last time the German gunner had again miscalculated, but only by a few inches. As we swung round from the main road into the lane his shell had just caught and shattered the side of a ruined house that stood at the corner. Down it came into the road almost on top of us, smothering the car with dust and bits of broken brick as we sped past.

Chance. But 'chances' and 'accidents' are only events whose pre-determining chain of causes happens for the time being to be unsuspected. The German gunner had

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perhaps a bad sore throat or had had too large a breakfast, so his eye was out and he missed us; but it seemed unreal to talk of Free-will or to pretend that it was any virtue or merit on our part that each time we had just escaped.

If we knew all about all our ancestors and their environment and the proportion in us of each one of them and the reaction on such a composite personality of our changing environment, could we not predicate all our reactions even to that sudden leap forwards or sideways at the sound of a bursting shell that I had just made near the canal bank?

Once, in Berlin, with a New Zealander who had fought in the War, the same question arose. We had encountered a badly crippled youth who was much too young to have served as a soldier. The papers and letters which he produced, some of them kindly letters from English sergeants in our Army of Occupation in Cologne and others that bore signs of having been examined at a British Consulate, showed that his story of 'war wounds' was correct. Apparently, one of our airmen, endeavouring to bomb the Hohenzollern Bridge at Cologne, had made a bad shot and his bomb had fallen on to a hospital devoted to the care of crippled German children. Many of the children partially cured of their ailments had been hopelessly crippled afresh. To make matters worse, the building had taken fire and part of it had collapsed.

Even if there were positive proof that Free-will existed, we could, no more than could that blundering airman, be held morally responsible for the ultimate effect of our actions but only for our motives, and the stupidities and ignorances that misdirect our motives.

It is Destiny that we live upon a small planet, are human, English, fair or dark, male or female. It is cer-

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tainly Destiny and not part of my Free-will that a German shell is arriving very near, but it is held to be Free-will that I happen to be feeling very well and wideawake to-day and have adroitly skipped out of its way.

The greater things of life upon this planet are predestined, the comparatively trifling details are supposed to be determined by something we call Free-will. Admittedly helpless puppets in the major matters, we choose to think that the Greater does not include the Less, that some of the parts are indeterminate and quite independent of the Whole. Where does the dividing line between predestined major conditions and free-willed minor events exactly fall? And does this line shift about in a predestined environment?

Apparently, to ourselves, we had in some matters an obvious freedom of choice; to an observer from another planet, aware of the influences of heredity and environment it might be obvious that the freedom was unreal. The sense of indecision and doubt we interpreted as evidence of Free-will was probably due to the uncertain issue of the unending conflict between our paternal and maternal inheritances, our minds being but travelling battlegrounds upon which our ageing arterics and changeful environment would favour one side or the other.

Yet it satisfies our conceit to imagine ourselves as 'Gods', architects of our own Destiny if only in the minor details, while we are at the same time marionettes in all the enveloping major circumstances. 'Blessed and very wise are the merciful.' Philosophers may resist, but they do not condemn—not even the Kaiser.

CHAPTER XXVIII

SURPRISE

In the dreary winter months the performances of the 'Versey Lights' were one of the few things we had to look forward to. Some in the Division were passable actors and singers and the 'girls' sufficiently lifelike; a little face powder and lipstick did wonders with some of the slim youngsters. One afternoon in February, 1917, a crowded house filled a shed between Carnoy and Mont Auban. G., the leader of the troupe, was having a mild flirtation on the stage with the principal 'girl', a red-headed young driver of the Army Service Corps. Suddenly the whole ground heaved as with an earthquake, there was a roar like an avalanche, the actors were flung flat upon their backs, the whole building rocked, our chairs spinning round underneath us.

'What's that?' asked G., springing excitedly to his feet. He was answered by a series of heavy thumps and crashes on the wooden roof. For a moment we imagined one of the Germans' seventeen inch shells must have landed somewhere near the hut, or that one of our own fifteen inch guns had fired close over our heads. A moment later begrimed and breathless men burst in, pale and excited.

'The camp's gone! Two whole regiments. Are there any doctors?'

Everyone dashed out to where the camp had been. Within fifty yards of the hut there was now a gigantic

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crater—a black gulf as of a volcano; all about its heaped and jagged edges, beneath mounds of fresh chalk and earth, were the twisted remains of army huts and scores of huddled, inanimate figures in khaki. A few awed and rather hysterical survivors were standing staring helplessly into the black and still-smoking gulf, as if at the ghosts of their comrades. Great boulders of chalky rock and flurries of reddish earth torn out of the depths eighty or a hundred feet below the ground were spread out fan-wise across the valley and even on to the side of the far slope, four hundred yards away.

At first no one knew what had happened, and we were far too busy picking up those who were still conscious to enquire. Somewhere in this neighbourhood during the first great offensive on the Somme in July, 1916, one of the series of huge mines we had dug underneath the German front-line trenches had failed to explode. It was said the Germans had countermined it, and we in our turn had gone underneath their countermine, and then in the advance the very existence of all this stored explosive had been forgotten!

That day, apparently, some officers of the King's, noticing that the remains of the old German front-line trenches which crossed the camp were swarming with rats, had started with some terriers and some bombs on a ratting expedition in the camp. One of them, we supposed—for they were all killed—must have blundered into the beginning of the shaft to the mine and flung a bomb into the darkness, hoping to drive rats out to the terriers; and all three mines had gone up simultaneously. For six months various battalions had been living in huts immediately above this sleeping dynamite. The two regiments concerned did not belong to our Division, and we never heard the exact number of casualties. It was said to be five or six hundred. But for

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so many from the camp being at the entertainment there would certainly have been more. Many scores of Nissen huts had been blown sky-high.

Ten years afterwards I visited the spot. There was still an immense pit in the ground some three or four hundred yards in circumference. The crater had become filled with bushes. I did not descend into it, but it looked to be still quite forty feet deep.

Past and Future are but the obverse and reverse of the same coin whose flashing rim, as it spins, is the Present. The Future like the Past, already a reality, waits as some wayside railway station for the train of our consciousness to flash through it. Some day, we may understand the workings of our subconscious mind—the mind that on its own account adds and subtracts automatically, considers and balances chances, keeps an eye on the minute hand of the clock, finally to rouse the sleeper from his dreams at the critical moment, as I was to be awakened at Gouzeaucourt.

Our position there in November, 1917, was precarious. The abortive but much-heralded attack on Cambrai on the 20th—a 'success' which had provoked such 'general rejoicings' at home that the London newspapers insisted that the joybells of St. Paul's should be rung in commemoration of our 'great victory'—had left us in a most vulnerable position. Our line now projected into the German line in a kind of box-shaped salient which might easily be pinched off if the enemy, while engaging and holding us with a strong frontal attack, struck simultaneously on one or both sides of the base of the salient. Yet we seemed neither to be wiring ourselves in, nor preparing either to go forward or to retire. We were in fact doing nothing but make a number of ineffectual but very costly assaults on Bourslon Wood; throwing away

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many picked troops, including a battalion of the Scots Guards, without making the slightest impression or in any way straightening out the sharp angles that made our position so tactically insecure.

The Germans were not only counter-attacking every day and causing a great number of casualties on our side, but, so our Air Force reported, were preparing a more massive counter-attack. The one good road that led back from the salient to the main British line ran for some distance close along the border of the salient and passed through my Advance Dressing Station, and this meant that we had to deal with the bulk of the wounded. Gradually all the horse and motor transport and the men of the bearer-sections of a number of other Field Ambulances were placed under my orders. In addition, two or three hundred young Riflemen, considered too inexperienced to take part in the assault on Cambrai, had been put with four of their officers under my orders to work alongside with my own men as extra stretcher-bearers. There must have been in front of us anything from eighty to a hundred thousand British troops engaged in these costly attempts—throwing good money after bad. Certainly men from eleven different Infantry Divisions, not to mention innumerable artillery units, were being passed back in our ambulance wagons.

Wounded were coming back to us night and day, literally by the thousand; twelve hundred 'stretcher cases' alone were reported in three days at one point where my stretcher parties were working. One of the young infantry subalterns, who had been sent to me to act as captain of stretcher parties, a diffident, pale-faced little shrimp who had a strong Cockney accent and could hardly have been tall enough to be a success even behind the counter at the haberdashers' shop where, it was understood, he had worked, led his stretcher parties for-

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ward unflinchingly under heavy fire. I came up with him in the ruins of a village called La Vacquerie a moment after he had been badly hit in the right arm. The whole elbow joint had been splintered and he was bleeding profusely, even dangerously; but with his face blanched white as a sheet he was trudging on, calmly winding a bandage round the very ugly wound.

'You must lie down at once where you are, and one of your own stretcher squads must carry you back to the Aid Post,' I told him as I hurriedly twisted the bandage into a tight tourniquet. He actually wanted to argue the point and, had I not angrily insisted, he would have gone on leading his squads with the main artery spurting, to have dropped dead in his tracks. He was only a 'temporary gent from Hope Brothers'.

On the 28th November there was a lull in the fighting. We had apparently given up our futile and fruitless attempts to capture Bourlon Wood. But so obvious was the insecurity of the general position that on the 29th I decided I could not risk having reserves of personnel or any transport any longer in front of Gouzeaucourt, or even too much of it there. The Quartermaster and most of the stores, all the horse-transport and some of the officers were sent back to Fins. I recalled as many as I dared from Masnières and Marcoing of the reserve stretcher-bearers and the motor-transport.

On the morning of the 30th a sense of coming danger aroused me about 4 a.m.; ordinarily I slept till much later. I don't know whether it was premonition or whether the explanation was simply mechanical; the lull before a big attack may be as disturbing to a sleeper as the stopping of the engines on an ocean liner; awake and restless, I dressed and went outside a good hour before dawn.

All was quiet, almost too quiet; my presentiment of a

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big attack was strong. The Germans could not surely be quite such fools as to fail to take advantage of the absurd weakness of our position when our only line of retreat was so exposed. For my own convenience I had converted my Advance Dressing Station into my main headquarters, and I knew I would be blamed for any consequent disaster to my unit. I walked down the hill to a house where the Sergeant-major slept. He looked at me reproachfully when I woke him. I told him to get up and turn out all the men of the motor-transport section and get the engines running. The night was bitterly cold, and they would take a longish time warming up. The cars were to be brought to the top of the hill with their noses pointing towards Pins. The Sergeant-major got up, rubbing his eyes, and resignedly began winding on his puttees. He must have thought I had suddenly gone mad.

I walked up the hill again. Still all was quiet, yet I felt so positive that I woke up one of the mess servants.

'Never mind about breakfast,' I told him. 'Just make us some tea and then get all mess gear packed. When you've made the tea, wake the officers and get their kit on the limbers.'

Walking back towards my own dug-out I looked eastwards towards the German line. A very faint dawn was beginning. I had not gone more than a few yards when I met my servant, Private Eldridge.

'Put my kit on a limber. . . .'

The rest of my directions were drowned in a long harsh screech and then a loud explosion. An armour-piercing shell from a German naval gun had skimmed close over our heads and, passing clean through the far wall of the roofless building we had turned into a dressing station, had burst amongst our howitzer batteries just across the road.

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'You needn't bother about waking the officers, Eldridge. That'll wake 'em.'

The unmistakeable dull ground-shaking rumble of drum fire had begun away on the right—to the east. The early morning sky on that side was already tinged with smoke. The German attack had begun, and it developed and enveloped us with the most astonishing speed. In a moment or two salvoes of high explosive shells were beginning to fall into the yard below us from which I had just cleared out the motor-transport belonging to the three Divisional Field Ambulances. There were the usual 'hurricane' effects of heavy shelling and the whistling of flying splinters of shell casing. Eastward, over the crest about eleven hundred yards away, I thought I could see groups of men with bayonets. I looked at them through my glasses; our infantry were surely retiring rather soon! A moment or two later I looked again. There was something unfamiliar about their movements; they were running down the hill and towards us in line. Suddenly I realized they were Germans coming over, and in very good order too! That looked as if they must have walked right through our 20th and 29th Divisions!

I could hardly believe my eyes. We must leg it even sooner than I had expected. The cars had been rapidly loaded and were now chock-full. I ran across the road to tell the driver of the train of Decauville trucks to get off at top speed and save his engine and train whatever happened. He went off with stragglers and lightly wounded men clambering on to every footboard, some even on the roofs of his trucks. As the narrow gauge train like a long snake steamed away down the hill towards Fins, a group of enemy shells tore up the track just behind it. We seemed to be in a circle of heavy fire; disorganization was rapid; from every direction artillerymen came running past. One N.C.O. shouted that a group of our howitzer

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batteries had been abandoned. Though unwounded, some of these men tried to climb into one of my motor ambulances, already overfull, that was just leaving.

It hardly seemed possible that the Germans could have also broken through on the other side of the salient, yet there was now a pretty general panic. I ran to the telephone in the small yard that did duty as my office and telephoned to a car which had been sent to Advance Divisional Headquarters the night before, ordering it to pick up any Staff or signallers left there, wounded or unwounded, and to collect any trench-codes, secret orders, and documents left in Headquarters, and then make for Fins; warning them they would have to run the gauntlet of shell fire both entering and leaving Gouzeaucourt. As I tried to disconnect the receiver and collect my own secret papers, B.A.B. trench-codes, and other things, and stuff them into my pockets, two German aeroplanes swept down to within fifty or sixty feet of the ground, raking the road and the little enclosure I was standing in with machine-guns. They missed me by inches. I could see that some, though only a few, of the German infantry had nearly reached the bottom of the street where our motors had been parked. Men of many units were now running through the main street of Gouzeaucourt towards Fins, some without rifles. The din had become terrific. Two of the motor ambulances had already left, crammed with wounded and personnel. Shouting to everyone to get into any sort of vehicle and make for Fins, I jumped on to the front of one of them.

As we started I heard someone shouting—it was E., Lord R.'s eldest son, a Staff Captain of one of our Brigades—running breathless and dusty behind us. We slowed down for a moment as he jumped in alongside me and the driver.

'Your Brigade!' I shouted. 'What's happened?'

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'Mostly gone! I was damn near captured myself. I have been knocked over three times in the last two hundred yards by shells bursting all along the road from Villers. I'm afraid the Division have lost nearly everything—including all the divisional artillery.'

As our car dashed out of Gouzeaucourt we narrowly missed a shell which burst on the side of the road between the second and third ambulance. Going as fast as the shell-pitted road would allow us, we made for main Divisional Headquarters some miles down the main road towards Fins. On either side of us men of all sorts and conditions, some half dressed, were bolting down the road. Strings of excited pioneers were running back to the road from the fields on either side, some throwing away their spades, also Artillerymen, men of the 29th Division Transport, Canadians, and Royal Engineers—it was becoming a real panic. A good many must have been wounded as they ran, for the first mile or so of the road between Gouzeaucourt and Fins was not only treeless but open on all sides, and it was being peppered with German shell. One man at full gallop was struck by a shell which carried away the hinder half of his horse and part of his hips. For a moment, a yard or two, this white-faced phantom seemed to cling to the still moving half of his horse. Then, as we sped by, both dead things crashed forward together on the *pavé*.

The wind was blowing strongly towards us, up the long switchback road over the chalk downs. Soon we could scarcely hear, though we could see, the bursting shells that followed us. Rapidly our line of cars out-distanced the streams of men who were running with us on either side of the road. Further on, as we approached Rear Divisional Headquarters, we passed on our right the officers of a large Canadian unit seated having breakfast, their men loafing and sitting about on the side of the

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road. We slowed down as I shouted out to them that they had better line up across the road, or anyway 'stand by'.

'Stand by! What on earth for?'

'Well, the Germans have broken through. They are in Gouzeaucourt!'

They grinned scornfully. The strong south-westerly wind had driven back the smoke and prevented anything more than a low rumble being heard. Even the packed condition of the ambulances, crammed with wounded, dusty and dishevelled men, failed to impress them. Their doubt was shaken by some riderless artillery horses that came galloping past, one wounded and with some blood on the saddle. Then a large detachment of pioneers burst excitedly into their lines from the opposite side, shouting some exaggerated tale about German infantry with fixed bayonets. We left the Canadian unit we had found so pleasantly breakfasting in a condition of uproar.

About eight hundred yards further on I ordered the ambulance I was in to run into the yard outside the Divisional Headquarters. Jumping off, I went in to where they were all comfortably at breakfast. They stared at me in surprise. What had I come in for so early? Had I left my Advanced Dressing Station at Gouzeaucourt?

'Well, the Germans are there now. We had to skedaddle.'

'The Germans . . . !'

'Yes, I suppose they are coming down the main Fins-Gouzeaucourt road!'

They stared incredulously; then they looked at E. who had followed me in—a Staff Captain, capless, his knuckles bleeding, unshaven, dusty. Even then I think they might have suspected we were merely a couple of panic-stricken lunatics had not a well-aimed and timely

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German shell exploded fairly near their mess kitchen. Then all the possibilities must have flashed through their minds—the strong south-westerly wind, cut telephone wires, and the unlikelihood of our both being demented. Then another shell arrived. I had not time to watch the effect of the second on the Brass Hats, but was told that this pleasant breakfast party also broke up a little hurriedly.

E. had pluck. It was a miracle he got through, for the road from Villers Plouich was being well hammered. The information he brought back must have been invaluable at such a moment.

Arriving at my own Headquarters about a quarter of a mile further back, there was some satisfaction in seeing the lines of horses and wagons I had sent down the night before and the motor-transport of several of the Field Ambulances intact. The personnel of my own unit, and the greater part of the other units that were working under my orders, had for the most part been also saved.

Within twenty minutes our bearer sections were equipped again, and we were all marching back along the road towards Gouzeaucourt behind a motley collection hastily scraped together of scratch Riflemen, cooks, officers' servants, and odd men from the neighbouring Parks and Dumps who were being hastily thrown into the gap to save what might have been an almost complete break-through by the Germans and one of the most serious disasters of the War. In three quarters of an hour we had opened a new Advanced Dressing Station near the Crater at Trescault crossroads.

Still, for a time things looked ugly. All the divisional stores and dumps of ammunition had been captured. A Staff Colonel of the 29th Division rode up very agitated. What was left of his Division, he exclaimed, simply could not hold on because they were short of ammunition. So

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—I knew it was wrong—I ordered a whole heap of ammunition which had been hastily emptied out of the pouches and bandoliers of all the wounded who were pouring into my main dressing station to be thrown into two empty Ford ambulance cars that were being rushed back to pick up wounded behind the new firing line, about halfway between Fins and Gouzeaucourt. The ammunition reached the firing line and may have made some difference. Under the same circumstances I should be tempted to do this again. But it was a breach of the spirit if not of the letter of the Geneva Convention.

Late that evening some of the lost ground had been recovered, as well as many of our men who had been slightly wounded. Several taken prisoner had lain low in dug-outs and, when the Germans retreated, escaped. But not only had most of our divisional artillery units been captured, but many of the best officers and men of the divisions were missing, killed or prisoners. The Division never seemed the same afterwards. Some incidents in the panic were funny enough. General X., a Divisional Commander, had, it was said, been seen running at top speed with his braces down towards Havrincourt Road. Another very famous senior officer escaped, like a nymph, dressed only in a bath towel.

Any intelligent lad with the map of our respective positions could have predicted this attack and its almost certain result. Even a boy of twelve might have asked why most of what little defence work that was being carried out was being done on our front between Masnières and Marcoing, and not on our exposed flank where the road that brought up our supplies and our best line of retreat so badly needed protection.

I was told that my unit had done well because, thanks to my pessimistic precautions, we had retired in fairly good order at a moment when hesitation might have been

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disastrous. Having run away, we had come back again fairly promptly and carried on, the least we could do. Other units that had retired before we did had, we heard, got into confusion and were either shot down or surrounded and captured. But with the telephone cut, some of my very best officers and men at Masnières and Marcoing, unaware of what was happening behind them, had either stuck gallantly to their posts or even started carrying back their wounded towards Gouzeaucourt, and thus into greater danger there, so that both they and those they had succoured came under both British and German fire and were in many cases killed or captured.

But that bell-ringing at home, those joy bells at St. Paul's? The newspapers from England, when they reached us, had an effect which, if any journalist or editor should see these lines, I hope he may feel it not beneath his dignity to consider. Some of us had thought the English newspapers incapable of such grotesque distortion and inaccuracy as to describe our abortive and costly attempt to reach Cambrai as 'a great victory'. If they could be so inaccurate about things we knew of, then clearly they were likely to have been at least equally inaccurate in their statements concerning 'Russian successes', 'German duplicity', 'Belgian atrocities' and 'American contraband'.

It was not surprising that men wrote home rather scornful letters concerning 'all this tosh about Cambrai' and began to disbelieve all the propaganda concerning the righteousness of the War, the prospect of a happy and prosperous England 'after the War', and the suggestion that this War would 'end war'. Newspaper proprietors, I suppose, count on the public having a short memory for individual facts, but is it quite so short for general impressions?

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One thing impressed us after the setback at Cambrai, and that was the way our wounded had been treated by the Germans. When we recovered part of the Gouzcaucourt area, which we did the next day after shelling it heavily, we found it strewn with wounded, mostly British. These men had been wounded the previous day as the enemy advanced. During the few hours the Germans had held this area they had found time to dress nearly all the British wounded. The dressing had been efficiently done; nearly all those with fractured limbs had had splints properly applied and the Germans had been generous in their use of dressings, and this at a time when owing to the increasing stringency of the blockade by the British fleet, cotton and other materials for dressings must have been extremely scarce in Germany. But that was not all. They had actually dressed our wounded, so these wounded resentfully assured us, under heavy fire from British guns. Many of the German medical staff had been killed by our guns while actually attending to our men and were lying dead beside them. Unavoidably we had killed or injured again quite a number of our own wounded. The survivors praised the German doctors and the devotion of the German orderlies, complaining at our having so mercilessly shelled the ground they lay on.

But the heroic work of the German doctors and medical orderlies was not to be talked about. It was better that the public in England should not hear about it, it being necessary to 'keep up the war fever' in England. The duty of the Press, Lord Northcliffe had said, was to suppress. *Suppressio veri* had ceased, to be *suggestio falsi* when it was done for 'patriotic' motives.

As the war dragged its slow length along, the absurdity of the whole business became so obvious that some-

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times in the very act of ploughing through a muddy trench, one felt inclined to stop and laugh.

'Crash!' At great expense someone had fired a shell and demolished the high pitched roof of a fine old Flemish mansion. Down came showers of heavy hand-cut roof slates, weathered by four hundred years of storm and sunshine.

'Crash!' Two young men, German or English, no matter which, crippled for life. Legs gone at the knee, spine injured; they must now be waited on helpless for the rest of their lives. 'Crash!' 'Crash!' 'Look out! You bloody fool! Can't you keep your blasted mules off the *pavé*?' . . .

Was the human race still in its infancy? Would it ever grow up? or was it already in its dotage?

What were we all doing out here in this mud and noise? Not infants or schoolboys but grown-up men—many of us fat, fussy and pompous, red-necked and grey-headed. There we were, extraordinarily busy in these muddy ditches, ceaselessly throwing large pieces of iron at some complete stranger a couple of hundred yards away—a most expensive, fatiguing, and entirely futile performance. Yet we were proud of it; just as some of us were proud of riding up and down Whitehall dressed up in gold lace and brass buttons and other trinkets with an inconveniently-shaped hat trimmed with more gold lace and cock's feathers. And the specially absurd part of the business was that if you happened to get into the way of one of these pieces of iron that all these uniformed schoolboys were flinging about so carelessly, even a piece fired by one of your own guns, all your friends immediately announced to the world that you were a 'hero', your name appeared in a Roll of Honour, and your grave, if you died from your wound, would ultimately be decorated with all

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kind of fal-lals, wreaths and whatnots. Whereas if you died from pneumonia owing to exposure on the footplate of a locomotive or at sea in a fishing boat or, as a hospital nurse, you caught diphtheria from a patient and died, no one took any special notice.

These Generals prancing about in Whitehall in hats decorated with cock's feathers and these other men out here hurling pieces of iron at one another. Was it not all rather infantile? No wonder that women, when irritation evoked their real thoughts, declared that all men were 'merely spoilt and overgrown babies'. And the chubby-checked young man from Westphalia or Bavaria, who had hurled from a thing he called his gun the particular piece of iron which you had unfortunately intercepted—he was of course a demon, a fiend, and a Hun; though at that precise moment he, like your English friends, was also dressed up in bright buttons and was probably kissing a photograph of his best girl, nibbling a piece of chocolate or writing an affectionate letter to his mother.

Such thoughts would be interrupted by meeting in the trench a rather pompous General Officer who might give you a ticking-off if you failed to salute him. But what silly-billies we all were.

At last the guns ceased. The singed and tattered curtain was rung down. Wearied actors and overwrought spectators gaped at the ruins, dazed and irresponsible as an awakened sleep-walker.

'Peace.' It sounded unlikely after all the abuse we had spouted, all we had done to those we fought against. Peace was a delicate seedless plant of slow growth, easily uprooted, needing a mild climate.

Versailles was indeed to propose a 'peace that passeth understanding'.

The 'Peace of November'—the real winter yet to come.

CHAPTER XXIX

AFTERMATH

So the first 'Great' War-to-end-War, which has made a second 'Great' War-to-end-War all but inevitable, had come to an end.

And what an End.

'Hang the Kaiser!'

We cried Peace when in our hearts there was no peace but only vindictiveness towards a defeated enemy, a nation who had laid down their arms, foolishly trusting promises concerning the Fourteen Points. Monstrous claims were advanced—twenty-five thousand millions sterling were talked of—and there were less than two thousand millions of gold on the whole earth. Demands were made, ridiculous, politically shameful or physically impossible, and this from a nation defenceless and in despair that for four years had withstood undaunted a world in arms. In this way we were providing the party of revenge and reaction in Germany with every possible justification for propagandising and accelerating the return to power of the Hohenzollerns.

Worst of all, the absurdly one-sided and unjust Treaty of Versailles had made one thing certain. In the future no combatant would ever lay down his arms or trust any armistice or any promise of mercy in the second Great-War-to-end-War. In the next war every combatant unless a complete fool will and must fight with unmeasured ferocity to the last ditch. The shameless abuse by France

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and ourselves of Greek neutrality, now openly admitted, was a reminder that in the next war any country which dared to remain neutral would run the risk of being, without warning, treated as an enemy.

If the Great War had resulted in a complete stalemate—the return of all the battered and bankrupt combatants to what the diplomatists call the *status quo ante*—that would surely have been the most conclusive proof for all time of the futility of War. If the United States of America had only had the sense to remain out, ready as an immensely strong neutral to throw her weight at the very end against any Power in the European dogfight claiming to be the victor, everyone would then have been anxious to come to terms; eager to prove that they at least were not the victors. We had gained by the War many of the German colonies—we already had rather too many of our own; also a large Turkish oilfield, an acquisition which irritated the French and Americans, and now occupied several strategically important parts of the Turkish Empire; this would make it easier for us in the next war. There were other supposed advantages. The victory brought the Allies increased military 'prestige' that was to lead the French into the wild futility of the Ruhr, and help to loose off the machine-guns at Amritsar. The seizing of the German merchant marine and the gigantic financial reparations demanded of the German nation stripped of its colonies and fleets crippled one of our best customers. Never mind—the Indian coolie on a wage of six annas a day must be persuaded to buy the goods the Germans could no longer afford; and we had at least eliminated our principal competitor in trade, so why bother about salesmanship. Anyway, the sinking of Germany's battleships removed one naval rival even if it proportionately increased the naval ambitions of the

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others. Why announce we had 'got nothing' out of the War when we had gained so many things that would presently prove an embarrassment to ourselves and indirectly become the cause of Europe's ruin? But at least we had satisfied our jealousy of Germany's success in trade and partially appeased the French lust for 'la revanche'—the longed-for revenge for their humiliation after shouting 'À Berlin' in 1870 and then sending an ill-equipped badly led army towards the German frontier.

There was to be as little sense shown in making the peace and pretending there would not be another war, as there had been in making those criminal 'Declarations of War'. Fresh wars and disturbances blazed up in Ireland, Hungary, Afghanistan, Poland, Rumania, Egypt, China and other countries. Meanwhile, besides our own Expedition at Archangel, five military or naval expeditions under Deniken, Wrangel, Kolchak, Yudenitch, and Pilsudski had been launched with the help and approval of France and England against our late ally, Russia, who, exhausted by the long and disastrous struggle, now famine-stricken, ravaged by the typhus and politically in confusion, was called upon to restore a despotism we had ourselves denounced or to pay in full debts incurred on the security of the whole of her Empire, after several of the most valuable of her Western provinces had been taken away.

The financiers, whom unthinking people foolishly suppose to be always level-headed, and realist—though they are seldom in contact with the toilsome and primitive realities of life, were urging us to throw good money after bad by invading Russia at the very moment when half Asia was ablaze, discontent rampant in India and spreading in the Near East. No one troubled to consider

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whether even if Russia had still had a Czar, she could after a most disastrous war, a terrible famine, a frightful epidemic of typhus and her troubles and losses in Finland, Esthonia, Poland and the Ukraine and the damage done by the White invading armies, have been in any case able to pay her debts. Even England herself with much less excuse than Russia was unable to meet in full her obligations to the United States, pleading that she could only pay three and a half per cent on the money she had borrowed from American citizens, though she was paying over five per cent to her own citizens for money borrowed from them at the same time and for the same purpose.

As the War petered out, family bereavements and other personal troubles came thick and fast. My father had died quite suddenly in 1917, and my mother was now dangerously ill in a nursing home. Directly and indirectly the War had taken heavy toll, including two of the very best of the younger generation. In my own family circle there were soon to be five widows. The prolonged strain and the shortage of meat, fats, and sugar had almost worn out the national resistance to disease. Everywhere, everyone's nerves were frayed.

Home on short leave in 1918, I met at the War Office Sir Edward Worthington, with whom I had served as a subaltern in India. I had then been nearly four years in France, and something was said about Russia. Would I care for a job there? Worthington thought I looked ill, and as the Russian job would be strenuous I had better in any case have a Board to see if I was fit. I was certainly jaundiced, and repeated attacks of trench fever had done my heart no good. For the first time in my life I had even been indulging in the feminine luxury of fainting fits.

'Quite unfit for Active Service' was the Board's curt

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message. Astonished, I repaired to Harley Street where pessimist baronets were even more definite. My heart was all wrong; I should 'never be fit for much again'! Events were to prove that even Harley Street can be wrong.

Recuperating in Cornwall, I was recalled by wire to the hectic scene of post-War London. Whitehall was full of rumours of personal disputes and fresh wars. The Russian adventures of Mr. Churchill, the activities of Lenin and Pilsudski, Admiral Horthy, and Poincaré, the controversies between Sir Frederick Maurice and Mr. Lloyd George, Curzon, and Bonar Law, filled the news; while the discontent of the disbanded troops and the even greater discontent of those who were not disbanded was bringing revolution within sight.

'Lies—Damned Lies—Demobi-lies' mocked the men in the large Convalescent Camp to which I was sent as Commandant, and where we were supposed to be training men, who had come back rotten with chronic dysentery from the heat of Mesopotamia, to take part in a winter campaign in Northern Russia! It wasn't cheering to be told that under my predecessor—a Regular combatant officer—there had been mutinies and discontent. In the large War Hospital adjacent, of which I was also to be in charge, I was to replace a brother officer of my own Corps who was not only a personal friend but a most likeable and efficient Director and whose only fault had been that he had bluntly told the members of a Committee (including a bishop and two ex-Cabinet Ministers) that had been 'managing' the Hospital, that they were being deceived—so he must go! It was not surprising, considering the general state of the country that in these large and hastily-organized units there was a good deal of confusion beside many quite definite reasons for dis-

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content. Bedding was being pilfered and the men's meat stolen; one of the culprits we caught red-handed. So discontented were these convalescents that they refused to appear on parade and sent a telegram addressed to the King at Buckingham Palace to the effect that 'the Palace at Addington (which formed part of our Hospital) would be burnt down'. Then rumours came that lorry loads of armed men had forced the gates at the War Office and that the Guards had been turned out across Whitehall and Victoria Street to prevent swarms of dissatisfied soldiers from creating disorder. 'Revolution' was in the air.

In the large camp dining-hall at Addington where more than a thousand disgruntled men, mostly new arrivals, had collected in anger, I got on a table and reminded them that if they burnt down Addington Palace it would not be the King and Queen who would have to spend the night in the rain in Shirley Woods, but our noble selves. It was said that some who had come to the meeting had brought their rifles. I told them that as far as I was concerned they were welcome to shoot myself or anyone else if it would give them any satisfaction. Someone clicked a rifle—unloaded, I am certain—but anyway I didn't care. I was feeling ill, sick and tired of it all. They told me they had been forced to go from the battlefields of Flanders and Mesopotamia to the Black Sea and to Archangel, ordered to shoot down Russian peasants revolting against the age-long despotism of the Czars 'in order that Belgium might be avenged for the burning of Louvain by a German army'!

It was not surprising that they were discontented. They complained, and many had proof of it, that they had been nine months without pay, two years without leave, and in many cases three months without a bath or a change of underlinen. Their bodies were verminous and

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their minds sick. They had been bucketed about—they used a much more expressive word—by the exigencies of Mr. Churchill's Russophobia. Their mutinous behaviour—that morning they had rushed the Sergeant-major and overthrown the pay-table because, having arrived without documents, for most of them there could be no pay drawn—was, they explained, no reflection on me, I being like themselves a newcomer, but was intended as a protest against the way they had been neglected and deceived, the way our Government had misused the powers hurriedly given to it in wartime to drive the Germans out of Belgium for quite other policies and for quite other purposes. I told them that what astonished me was not that they had mutinied that morning but that they had not all mutinied long ago; that I would do my best for them. They should each have some pay and their Christmas leave which the War Office had 'post-poned', even if I was court-martialled for it.

There were no more mutinies.

Then to Woolwich! It was part of my job to interview the patients in the Special Hospital at Sidcup, who were suffering from terrible deformities due to mutilating wounds of the face. I had learnt to operate myself under Sir Arbuthnot Lane, Sir Alfred Fripp and other well-known surgeons at Guy's Hospital, and I was impressed at the skill and the care with which many of these terribly deforming wounds had been treated in Germany. Mutilated noses and deformities of the eyelids and mouth caused by fragments of shell having torn away large pieces of flesh, had been repaired by German surgeons in a way that could only have been accomplished by the employment of ability, the exercise of much patience, perseverance, and delicate care on the part of the German nurses and assistant-surgeons. Some of these mutilated men anxious to do something to prevent the repetition of

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the horrors and suffering they had themselves endured offered to parade the streets as sandwichmen, propagandising for the League of Nations. There were to be only four words on their sandwich-boards—'The Results of War!'

I interviewed the Secretary of the League of Nations and offered to pay the expenses of employing half a dozen of them. The London Secretary wrote me a kind and appreciative letter, but evidently feared that the men's quite voluntary offer would be misrepresented as an exploitation of their deformities. Perhaps there were influential persons on his committee who feared that such a propaganda against war might be *too* effective; or did the Germanophobes fear that the public might learn from some of these men of the care with which they had been treated?

Then I was to be sent to Ireland, to the Ireland that we English have been trying unsuccessfully to govern for seven hundred years—surely the worst, the most prolonged and inexcusable failure in history.

In this, the Ireland of the Black and Tan imbroglio, I was to stare at the wreckage in Dublin and then at the still smoking ruins of Cork City; to pass daily as a Staff Officer—in mufti because it was 'safer'—through the gates of Cork Barracks. Outside those gates women, girls, and small children, clad in deepest mourning, knelt in the mud, shook their bony fists in my face, waved their lean arms and called down the curses of Heaven on the 'bloody English'. Their sons, their brothers, their sweethearts, many of them little more than children, were being executed inside those gates and elsewhere in Ireland by 'cruel, bloodthirsty bloody-hearted English' who, they screamed, had tyrannized over and misgoverned their country for generations.

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They sobbed and moaned and prayed strange Catholic prayers and spat at the Union Jack that hung from the staff just within the gates. They cursed at me—at *me*—who hated our refusal of liberty to Ireland and India, our callous commercialism, our colossal hypocrisy, even more than they did. Yet I shuddered at their imprecations. Perhaps after all there *was* a God! A God who cared for the Indian and the Irish women's prayers more than for England's 'Empire', a God who would incline his ear to these lamentations and make good at some future time the curses of these sorrow-demented women. England might have to suffer, to repay all her boasted 'success' to the uttermost farthing, and I as an Englishman would have to suffer with her! But how I loathed it all. I wrote an application for a transfer, then I offered to resign—it meant forfeiting my pension. Refused! I, too, though an officer and a Regular, was now, it seems, by the grace of the Lloyd-Georgian 'Liberals' under Martial Law, not under Military Law—a bitter and significant distinction.

Then surrender!

Surrender—though of infantry alone in the Cork Command we had twenty-eight Battalions, and swarms of armed Auxilliary Police and tanks, machine-guns, aeroplanes and wireless; with our battleships patrolling the coast and a propagandist department busily concocting and embroidering fairy tales of 'Irish brutality' for consumption in the United States and Dominions.

I am neither Irish nor Roman Catholic nor even a sentimental admirer of the Celtic people, but I realized the depths of our humiliation and the extent of our failure as I stood and watched the Union Jack being ingloriously hauled down—down from the very flagstaff at which those screaming women had spat.

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Surrender—to those ragged bands of half-starved boys, so badly armed, who had slept out amidst the rocks and bogs on those bleak wind-swept mountains in the cold rain of Ireland's winters, who had been bludgeoned by our militarized police, harried and spied upon, confined in our prisons and guardrooms, or interned behind barbed wire on the rock-bound island of Berehaven. These uncouth lads, tubercular many of them now from continuous exposure and hardship, had won! With their dark matted hair and flushed hollow faces, lean, wild-eyed and unconquerable.

So the lamentations of the weak had cast the mighty from their seat. Someone, Something—*was* it a God?—had heard their prayers. Does that Something listen now as I write to the screams of Indian women and girls who are being jailed and beaten by our police in India?

I was told I had done well to have had no mutinies at Addington, and because when Commandant of a School of Hygiene in Northern Ireland I had volunteered for service in detested and detestable Cork, so now I might have what I asked for. I applied for and was promptly sent to Cologne and later given a Staff job at the Headquarters of the Army of Occupation. It was a good billet; such as it was probably the best anyone of my rank and Corps could have hoped for at a time when our Army was being reduced in all directions and hundreds of Staff officers were being returned to regimental duty.

Here I was content at last; could sit back and have time to think, to see things in their true perspective.

Looking back upon the prolonged horrors of the Great War and the sordid muddle of our campaign in Ireland, where one had been compelled to listen to and even to witness things done by men in British uniform which I had once supposed to be confined to the Bashi-

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Bazouks and Balkan bandits, it was a relief to meet and talk to quiet honest German peasants and townsfolk again. Yet serving now with our Army of Occupation I was to be compelled to witness fresh misery—to be amazed at the unscrupulous manœuvres and vindictiveness of the French, who were quartering licentious negro troops on the households of University dons and professors at Bonn. Now I was to be compelled to watch the struggles and sufferings of the German middle classes and listen to talk of fresh wars with Russia and Turkey and even with the United States.

Could the German recover? Military defeat was not irreparable, as the French had shown after Sedan. Great nations are not so often destroyed by their enemies without as by want of common honesty and justice within. Others like myself were beginning to realise there had been something worse than mere folly and shortsightedness in our reckless and persistent Germanophobia ever since 1888. Injustice to a now defenceless foe had been a degradation of our national soul, an irreparable disaster for which we were already beginning to pay. Cork might not be our only surrender. Would we repeat the Irish blunder of repression, but on a vaster scale, in India? Then, indeed, we should deserve our downfall.

One evening in the bitter winter of 1922-23 some German children had come begging to my kitchen door in Cologne. It was hard to believe these stunted wastrels pale and emaciated and in threadbare clothing, were, as they said, the orphans of a German admiral. Their mother had died of cold and starvation in an attic, after being kept alive for months by the generosity of some of the English clerks in Barclays Bank in Cologne. And the cause of this suffering? It was the rigour of our blockade

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continued long after the Armistice, followed by the grotesque and impossible demands we made on a now defenceless nation. Worst of all, it had been a demand capable of being almost indefinitely increased if these wretched debt-slaves ever showed any signs of lifting their heads in hope—made any real effort towards economic recovery. That indefinite extension of an impossible claim had completed the moral and economic ruin of the German middle classes; it was a breach of faith beside which Lord Clive's deception of Ormichund by his forgery of Admiral Watson's signature on the eve of the Battle of Plassey seems a mere peccadillo. . . .

We brought the children into the comfortable kitchen, always warm and brightly lit—the fuel and light cost us nothing, the Germans had to supply them free of charge. We gave the starvelings white bread with real butter on it and tea with milk. At first so surprised were they by our unexpected sympathy, they cried and could not eat—the first fruits of the Treaty of Versailles! I remember I turned away.

At long last I was disillusioned.

Durga Sah Municipal Library.

Naini Tal.

दुर्गासाह नमुनिसिपल लाउब्रेरी

नैनीताल

APPENDIX I

Officers of the 4th Dragoon Guards and certain others in the 2nd Cavalry Brigade, who are mentioned in the text.

4TH ROYAL IRISH DRAGOON GUARDS

Colonel Commanding

R. L. Mullens (afterwards Major-General)

Second in Command

A. Solly-Flood, (afterwards Major-General)

D.S.O.

Squadron Leaders

G. T. M. Bridges, (afterwards Lieut.-General)

D.S.O.

Twice severely wounded

C. F. Hunter (afterwards Brigadier-General)

Robert Hutchison (afterwards Major-General)

Captains and Subalterns

C. B. Hornby Severely wounded 1914

A. Carton de Wiart Ten times wounded and V.C.
(afterwards Brigadier-General)

H. S. Sewell Wounded 1914 and 1915 (after-
wards Brigadier-General)

R. K. McGilly- To command of Machine-Gun
cuddy School

A. Gallaher Wounded 1914 and 1915
Hardress Lloyd (afterwards Brigadier-General)

J. W. Aylmer To Staff

Sir A. E. Hick- Wounded and captured, 1914
man, BART.

O. B. Sanderson Wounded and captured, 1914

APPENDIX I

R. G. Featherston- haugh	Wounded, 1914.
F. B. B. Pigeon	Invalided
J. Holman	Killed, 1914
R. Gordon-Munro	Wounded, 1914
R. J. F. Chance	Wounded, 1914 and 1918
—— Jones	(from 13th Hussars)
A. Wright	Wounded, 1914
H. de G. Warter	Wounded, 1914. Killed, 1917
S. J. W. Railston	Killed, 1914
—— Thwaites	Wounded, 1914
W. Sharpe	Wounded, 1914
—— Ramsay	Wounded and captured, 1914
K. W. Elmslie	Killed, 1914
R. J. B. Oldroy	Killed, 1914
G. H. Fitzgerald	Killed, 1914
D. G. F. Darley	Wounded, 1914
F. A. Dunham	(Quartermaster)

ATTACHED FOR INTELLIGENCE DUTIES AND FROM FRENCH ARMY AS LIAISON OFFICERS AND INTERPRETERS

Charles Romer- Williams	
—— Harrison	(from 10th Hussars)
John Kirkwood	(from Life Guards)
The Vicomte de Vauvineur	Killed, 1914
The Marquis de St. Charmant	
Gal de Ledevéz	

and several others killed or wounded and captured
on 24th August, 1914.

APPENDIX I

OFFICERS OF THE 9TH QUEEN'S ROYAL LANCERS AND
18TH QUEEN MARY'S OWN HUSSARS INCLUDED THE
FOLLOWING:

Lieut.-Colonels

David G. M. Campbell	(9th)
C. K. Burnett	(18th)

Majors, Captains and Lieutenants

D. J. E. Beale-Brown	(9th)
L. W. de V. Sadleir Jackson,	
D.S.O.	(9th)
D. K. L. Lucas Tooth	(9th)
Francis O. Grenfell	(9th)
J. G. Porter	(9th)
W. H. R. Court	(9th)
G. H. Phipps Hornby	(9th)
F. de V. B. Allfrey	(9th)
J. A. Straker	(9th)
—— Straker-Smith	(9th)
—— Spencer	(9th)
R. L. Benson	(9th)
G. F. Reynolds	(9th)
R. Grenfell	(9th)
Lord Basil Blackwood	(9th)
G. H. A'Court	(9th)
C. J. Thackwell, D.S.O.	(18th)
G. W. Gore Langton	(18th)
Bernard Neame	(18th)
W. Holdsworth	(18th)
T. Lawrence, V.C.	(18th)
C. H. Corbett	(18th)
W. H. Parsons	(18th)

STAFF OF 2ND CAVALRY BRIGADE

<i>Brigadier-General</i>	H. de B. de Lisle
<i>Brigade-Major</i>	R. S. Hamilton Grace
<i>Staff-Captain</i>	F. W. Barrett

APPENDIX II

ROUGH RECORD OF MOVEMENTS OF THE 4TH DRAGOON GUARDS DURING THE FOUR WEEKS 19TH AUGUST— 15TH SEPTEMBER, 1914.

The Unit left Tidworth about 4 a.m. on Saturday the 16th August, embarked at Southampton, spent the following night at sea and the next in camp at Boulogne. Proceeding by train via Ham and St. Quentin to Hautmont, arriving 19th August.

Zigzag and encircling movements are not included. During part of the Retreat from Mons the Regiment became broken up into several detachments—the movements of only one of these is included.

8 a.m. Aug. 19, 1914	Hautmont
	Ferrier-le-Grand (Mauberge)
Night of Aug. 19/20	Damousies
	Obrécies
	Aibes
	Consolre
Left 6 a.m. Aug. 21	Damousies
	Quievalon
	Collenet
	Jumont
	Vieuxreng
	Villers-Sire-Nicol
	Civry
	Harmignies
	Convent Gates

APPENDIX II

<i>Night of 21/22 Aug.</i>	Bois le Haut Casteau SOIGNIES—First contact with German cavalry Harmignies Frameries Paturages Wasmes
<i>Night of 22/23 Aug.</i>	Thulin BATTLE OF MONS BEGINS
<i>Night of 23/24 Aug.</i>	MARLIÈRE ELOUGES Audregnies RETREAT FROM MONS BEGINS Angre Sebourg Jenlain Preux-au-sart
<i>Night of 24/25 Aug.</i>	Wargnies-le-Petit Orsinval Le Quesnoy Beaudignies ESCARMAIN Vendegies MAISON BLEU Vertain Beaurain Vendegie-au-Bois Englefontaine Croix Forest
<i>Night of 25/26 Aug.</i>	Le Cateau BATTLE OF LE CATEAU Bazuel Mazinghien

APPENDIX II

	Ribauville
	La Vallée Mulatre
	Audigny
	Busigny
	Bohain
	Beaurevoir
	<i>near</i> Le Catelet
	Bony
	Hargicourt
<i>Night of 26/27 Aug.</i>	Templeux Le Gerard
	Hargicourt
	Bellicourt
	Fresnoy-Le-Grand
	Le Verguier
	Bellenglise
	Pontru
	Fresnoy-le-petit
	Gricourt
	St. QUENTIN
	Savy
<i>Night of 27/28 Aug.</i>	Roupy
	Ham
<i>Night of 28/29 Aug.</i>	LE PLESSIS PAT D'OIE
	GUISCARD
	NOYON
<i>Night of 29/30 Aug.</i>	Ourscamps
	Carlepont
	Tracy-le-val
	Tracy-le-mont
	Offremont
	St. Crepin-au-bois
	Rethondes
<i>Night of 30/31 Aug.</i>	Vieux Moulin
	Compiègne
	Venette

APPENDIX II

	Lachelle
	Le Meux
	Chevrières
	Bazicourt
	Pont St. Maxence
	Beaurepaire
	Creil
	Senlis
<i>Night of 31 Aug./</i>	Mont l'Evêque
<i>1 Sept.</i>	Mont Lognon
	Ermenonville
	Morte Fontaine
	Moussey-le-neuf
	Moussey-le-vieux
	Villeneuve
	Dammartin
<i>Night of 1/2 Sept.</i>	Thieux
	Mitry Moiry
	Ville Parisis
	Le Pin
	Chelles
<i>Night of 2/3 Sept.</i>	Gournay
	PARIS
<i>Night of 4/5 Sept.</i>	Gournay. ADVANCE BEGINS
	Ozoir-le-ferier
	Ozouer
	Limoges
<i>Night of 5/6 Sept.</i>	Bois-le-Herbert Farm
	Rozoy
	BATTLE OF THE FIVE RIVERS
	BEGINS
	Pécy
	Jouy-le-Chatel
<i>Night of 6/7 Sept.</i>	Bivouac near Le Corbier
	Les Essarts

APPENDIX II

- Bannost Crossroads
 Fretoy
 Moncel
 Chevru
 Choisy
Night of 7/8 Sept. Feraubrey Farm (Le Frenois)
 La Ferte Gaucher
 CROSS THE GRAND MORIN
 Rebais
 Champ-la-bride
 Le Tretoir
 La Forge
 CROSS THE PETIT MORIN
Night of 8/9 Sept. Basseville (La Fromentiere farm)
 Nogent
 Chezy
 CROSS THE MARNE
 Azy
 Bonneil
 Le Thiolet
Night of 9/10 Sept. La Croisette Farm
 Mouthière
 Sommelans
 Nanteuil-sur-ourc
 Rozet
 Grisolles
Night of 10/11 Sept. Le Chêne Farm
 Grand Menil
 Oulchy-le-château
 CROSS THE OURCQ
 Grand Rozoy
 Beaugneux
Night of 11/12 Sept. Arcy St. Restitue
 Cerseuil
 CROSS THE VESLE

APPENDIX II

	Braisne
	Courceel
	Dhuizel
<i>Night of 12/13 Sept.</i>	Longueval
	BATTLE OF THE AISNE BEGINS
	CROSS THE AISNE
	Bourg
	Soupir
	Chavonne
	Pont D'Arcy
	Ocuilly
	Moulins
	Paissy
MARCH NORTHWARDS FROM THE AISNE TO MESSINES	
<i>Left 5 a.m. on the</i>	
<i>30 Sept., 1914</i>	LONGUEVAL
	Vauxere
	Perles
	Bazoches (La Maladrie Farm)
	St. Thibaud
<i>30 Sept. to 2 Oct.</i>	Ville Savoie (Mont St. Martin Farm)
	Mont Notre Dame
	Linie
<i>Night of 2/3 Oct.</i>	Cerseuil Farm
	Braine
<i>Night of 3/4 Oct.</i>	Chassemy (held trenches opposite Fort Condé)
	Wassemey
	Couvrelles
	Nampteuil
	Charrise
	Hartennes
	Le Plessier Huleu

APPENDIX II

	Longpont
	Villers Cotterets
<i>Night of 4/5 Oct.</i>	Coyolles
	Crepy-en-Valois
	Le Croix de St. Ouen
	Le Meux
	Lachelle
<i>Night of 5/6 Oct.</i>	Gournay
	Wacque Moulin
	Montdidier
<i>Night of 6/7 Oct.</i>	Aubvillers
	Moreuil
	Amiens
<i>Night of 7/8 Oct.</i>	Villers Bocage
	Doullens
<i>Night of 8/9 Oct.</i>	Le Souiche
	St. Pol
	Lillers
	St. Venant
<i>Night of 9/10 Oct.</i>	FOREST DE NIEPPE
	FIRST BATTLE OF YPRES BEGINS
	Vieux Berguin
	Strazeele
	Merris
	Petit-sec-bois
	Pradelles
<i>Night of 10/11 Oct.</i>	Flêtre
	Berthen
<i>Night of 11/12 Oct.</i>	Mont Vidaigne
	Dranoutre
	Locre
<i>Night of 13/14 Oct.</i>	Neuve Eglise
<i>Night of 14/15 Oct.</i>	Ploegsteert
	Le Touquet
	Messines

APPENDIX II

<i>Night of 15/16 Oct.</i>	St. Yves Neuve Eglise
<i>Night of 16/17 Oct.</i>	Le Gheir Ploegsteert Wulverghem Wytesheate
<i>October 24th.</i>	Messines